

A World of Negative Emotions

Winter 2022

nostro



SEFA



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Printed Edition

Letter from the Editor

“More than rational animals, we are emotional animals”
– Mauricio García Villegas.

The world is remembered for its headline-grabbing events that have shocked our collective history. We seldom remember our world by the emotions that those events have created. It is rare to inspect our existence through a solely emotional lens, at least consciously.

As the world is engulfed with the invasion of a sovereign country, an imminent climate crisis, rising tensions between superpowers, and financial distress, the emotions that rise steam out of our days are forgotten. Only the interest rate hikes, the shifts in frontlines, the death tolls and the unfulfilled promises by governments and businesses remain in our memory. The stories of credit debtors whose stomachs twist as their loans are adjusted, and their premiums become unpayable don't stick. Nor do the long nights of soldiers who sit in the dark as missiles pummel them into darkness.

This printed edition aims to review things we already know from a personal and emotional perspective. Our editors have discovered stories like the effects of natural disasters on happiness and their connection to the economy. Or the moving personal account of an inmate of Guantánamo. They even looked at the reality of the unsustainable growth of the University of Amsterdam from a renewed, human perspective. And much more.

Like we did as we prepared the first edition of this year, we would like to invite our readers to keep the emotional angle of news and events in their minds. Our policy is not crafted to appease rationality. It is to pacify negative emotions. The value created by our institutions is useless if they fail at preventing suffering. So, if we wish to improve our world, the feelings we work to elicit will be the measure of our success.

We wish, our dear reader, that this proves an entertaining and moving read from the entirety of Rostra Economica. As you jump from page to page, remember: you are what you read.



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History

Rostra Economica was founded in May 1953 as the new magazine of the faculty study association (SEF) of the faculty of economics at the University of Amsterdam. Its formal purpose was to provide current information and to publish mostly academic articles. However, the magazine also served as a means for students to reflect on the faculty. Professors connected the academic community at the faculty through contributions. Over time, Rostra Economica became a vital part of the SEF and a load on the association's funds. At one point, Rostra Economica represented over 90% of its budget.

To make the magazine financially sustainable, economics students of the University of Amsterdam and the VU University Amsterdam decided to cooperate. In 1965, at its 52nd edition, the magazine was renamed Rostra Economica Amstelodamensis, now published for both universities in Amsterdam. The marriage did not last long. In 1968, the magazine was discontinued. An argument between the SEF and the editorial board on the future cooperation with the VU found the magazine unable to get its contributors and editors in accordance. The University of Amsterdam funded an attempt to start over. The magazine, now called Rostra, started publishing again in 1970. It was a short magazine, hardly four pages long, and not at all appealing to students at the faculty. It seemed the magazine had lost its right to existence.

The new editorial board of 1972 did not agree with that notion. With a new layout and renewed enthusiasm to be more than an announcement bulletin for the SEF, the magazine gained new life. Topics were increasingly less academic and focused more on current affairs in economics and at the university. In 1981, the magazine celebrated its 100th edition. The magazine was again named Rostra Economica in 1986, a name it has retained until now. Under its new (and old) name, the magazine pushed towards its 200th edition in 1994 and its 50th birthday in 2003. The magazine featured more interviews with crucial economics and politics figures, from Nout Wellink to Mark Rutte.

Although the history of Rostra Economica has been vibrant, to say the least, the magazine has gone through some of its biggest changes in the last 12 years. In 2010, Rostra Economica was published in English for the first time. Changes in the media landscape did not go unnoticed either. When the magazine arrived at its 300th edition in 2014, it was clear that the future of the magazine was online. In 2015, Rostra Economica launched its new website, providing more content at a higher frequency.

As the magazine learned how to balance the print and online world, the pandemic unexpectedly tipped the scale, forcing it to turn its online presence into its primary form of publishing. After years of constant printing, Rostra found itself absent in the hands of its readers. As Rostra Economica approaches its 70th anniversary, and with the pandemic in the past, it wishes to continue its tradition of print to reach one day its 400th edition. All while maintaining a renewed and constant presence online. As Rostra marches forward, it feels like the opening of a new chapter begins. One where it can establish itself in the minds of readers and editors alike. Where Rostra Economica, through print and online, can permeate the university culture as much as it did before.

Investigative Journalism
Investigative Journalism
Investigative Journalism
Investigative Journalism

The Destructive Growth of the University of Amsterdam

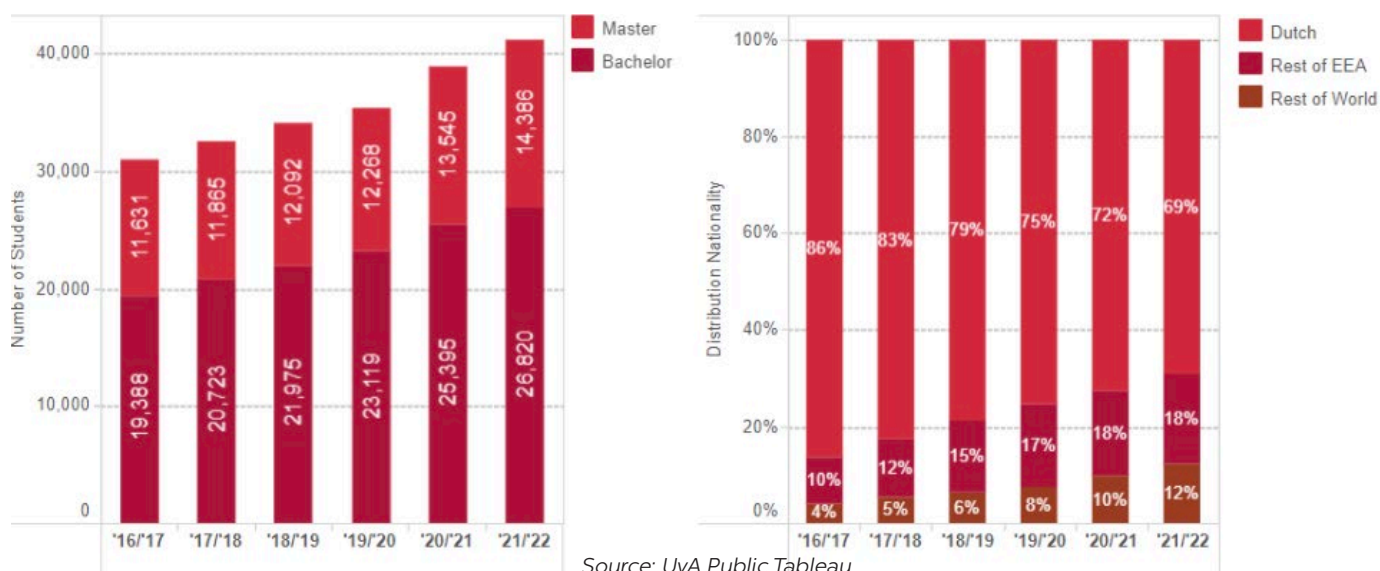
Alejandro was like any other student, desiring to pursue his studies in another country to explore a different culture and seek an education that would be of higher merit than the one he could get in his home country. His dream was to study Business Administration at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), but the harsh reality of the city's housing situation soon struck him. Alejandro desperately searched for a place to live to no avail. He was forced to withdraw from his enrollment offer, leaving his dream unfulfilled. This story was featured in an article by Folia, the university's magazine, which reported the dire reality newcomers face.

For many freshmen the university experience means being able to go on campus, move to a new city, make new friendships, and get a first taste of what adulthood feels like. Any-

body that has been through this phase knows how scary, but at the same time, how exciting it feels. Yet, in 2022, the housing problem became so pressing that in August, UvA made an official statement advising international students that still had not secured housing not to come to Amsterdam since there was a high risk they would remain homeless for an indefinite period. But the housing problem is just the tip of the iceberg. The root cause, which ultimately has an enormous impact on the quality of education, is unstoppable growth; in a European capital that is overcrowded not only with students but also with working professionals, the UvA recognizes that its growth has to stop. From hundreds of homeless students to professors striking, the overall well-being of students and university staff is at stake. So, what has caused this growth?



Increasing internationalization



From 2016 to 2022, the university has grown from 31,019 students to 41,206. A particular change has been seen in the declining numbers of Dutch students, going from 86% to 69%, whereas the percentage of students from EEA and the rest of the world has increased, from 10% to 18% and from 4% to 12%, respectively. The university has become very attractive to internationals, which is partly responsible for the surging growth. Yet, this increase could have been predicted by UvA due to their conscious efforts to internationalize the university, and something could have been done to prepare for it.

To explain the internationalization, one must look through the course catalogue. The university has en-

sured that programmes, especially at the Bachelor's level, are offered in English. The number of programmes provided in English has increased from 10 in 2015 to 35 in 2022. Moreover, the university has consistently marketed its international outlook and showcased Amsterdam as a global hub where diversity and inclusivity are priorities. This allowed and encouraged more international students to apply to various courses.

And the numbers have exploded. The president of ASVA (a student union), Bor van Zeeland, observed that the Bachelor of Media & Culture went from 90 to 460 new students and Political Science from 130 to 560 freshmen in just four years. Yet, Geert ten Dam, the chairman

of the executive board of UvA, notes internationalization itself is not the issue, but that the growth that comes with it - is. Importantly, as Director of College of Psychology Ingmar Vissier has noted, the Dutch students themselves indicated the desire to study in an international environment. Therefore, the university has acted not only from the inherent interest but also the localized interest to become more international.

Nonetheless, as Geert ten Dam expressed, this growth was unexpected. It seems that amid the university's enthusiasm for being an international student hub, it was not adequately considered whether the city of Amsterdam could sustain such a large influx of people that move here for study purposes.

Loose admission policy

Alongside the particular attraction of the international environment, the admission policy of UvA is loose. While the admission rate varies from source to source, the process is not as demanding as other universities. Most programmes require a high-school diploma, a motivation letter, and an English proficiency test. Howev-

er, there is no requirement for standardized test results, admission interviews, and other measures that universities apply to be more selective in their admission process. Only five courses have selective procedures. Psychology, Political Science, Liberal Arts & Sciences at AUC have numerus fixus imposed, meaning a

selected number of students are admitted. Business Administration has a placement test, and the PPLE programme has several admission rounds, including an essay round and an admission interview. Therefore, while this policy made education more accessible, it has also severely contributed to the university's growth.

Is the university profit driven?

Students are now speculating about the reasons behind the excessive growth at the university. On October 13, 2022, a protest occurred outside the Roeterseiland Campus. The student union ASVA organized this protest to raise awareness of the dangers and the effects of UvA's sizeable increase in recent years. According to an anonymous student, the motive of the protest was to put a notice on "the profit model of the university, which is all about growth, growth, growth."

The same student asserted,

"They [the students] are recruited here especially from, for example, the United States because the university receives a lot of money from them. But there's no housing here. Education, it's not what it's supposed to be. There's huge pressure on students, teachers, and supporting staff, and all of us, for profit, profit, profit". However, while profit may seem like a plausible cause for the growth, as international students from outside the EU must pay higher tuition fees, this is unlikely to be the case. In fact, the Dutch government covers most of the funding

of the university, with 81% of the total university budget coming from the government. The higher fees for the international students come to calibrate the costs, not to make a profit.

Therefore, the combination of the vibrant city of Amsterdam with the university's international outlook and a loose admission policy has significantly contributed to the flocking of many international students to the University of Amsterdam. Yet, as experienced by students, lecturers, and staff, all of this comes at a cost.

An overview of the effects

Tragedy of the Commons' is a socio-economic concept that describes that with every growing individual trying to reap maximum benefit from a given resource, other individuals cannot use the same resource. In short, this means that, ultimately, we live in a world of finite resources for infinite people. Much like that, the University's unprecedented growth trickles down to various effects that result in more harm than benefit for students and professors alike, along with the University's Management Board.



Protest #stopthegrowth : 13th October 2022

With a growing environment of over 41,000 students and 6,000 employees, the lack of balance between students and professors at the UvA is evident. As mentioned before, to take action against the damaging growth of the university, the ASVA student union held a protest along with other minor student unions, led by organizer Bor van Zeeland. The main idea surrounding the protest was to address the fact that the university needs to be held accountable and needs to restrict the number of students being admitted to the university. The imminent effects of the growth were clear in the protest. According to one of the interviewees, ASVA was flooded with emails from students who could not find a home and had

to cancel their studies at the university. The interviewee also mentioned that they expected the university to grow by almost 9,000 students in the next four years. They realized this was the right moment to come into action and represent the thousands of voices left unheard due to the ongoing crisis.

The protest concluded with the idea that the university must end the internationalization of different courses. The university president, Geert ten Dam, also supports this train of thought and agrees that further internationalization of students results in Dutch students not having a fair chance to apply to the different programs offered by the university. What is disappointing

about an opinion like this is that, at the end of the day, international students are being held responsible for something out of their control. In a factsheet published by the university in October 2019, the university noted that 'internationalization' at the university is not at the cost of being admitted; instead, the growth of international students is offset by a declining interest among Dutch students. It also mentions that the university believes in 'maintaining the right balance in the composition of an international classroom.' Then how is it that the tables have turned four years later, and international students are made to bear the brunt of a poor administrative decision made by the university?

Housing and Students: an eternal saga

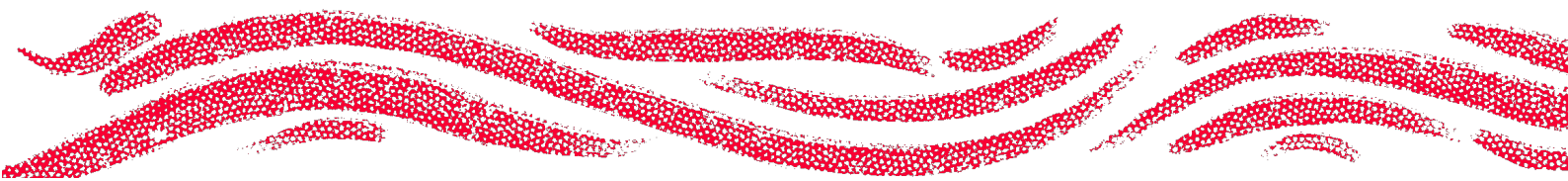
Being a student comes with countless tribulations - academic achievement, maintaining a balance between our social and academic life whilst trying to build a life miles away from home. However, being a student in Amsterdam comes with an additional tribulation - housing.

A large student body in a bustling city like Amsterdam, which is home not only to students but also to numerous families and young working professionals, is often disadvantaged when finding a house. Most students who come into the city for the first time are unaware of how big of an issue finding housing in Amsterdam really is. Only recent-

ly has the university's housing website put up a disclaimer discouraging students from coming to Amsterdam unless they have secured housing; however, the housing crisis has been an ongoing affair over the last 5 to 10 years. Furthermore, the housing shortage is at an all-time high and is projected to rise to 415,000 homes by 2024.

The university offers its help only through limited resources for students moving to the city for the first time. A proportion of incoming students, including first-year international bachelor and master students, are offered housing (approximately 3000 units) through the uni-

versity's tie-up with different housing agencies. On the other hand, second and third-year bachelor students are offered only so much as a webinar and a flyer on finding housing independently in Amsterdam, which usually contains outdated websites and resources. When using said resources, students are often met with disappointing results: some of them are scammed - losing almost 1000 euros to greedy landlords, whereas the rest are met with advertisements by landlords such as 'no internationals or students allowed.' At the end of the day, international students yet again face the brunt of this crisis.



Balancing Student Life

Housing is just the start of a university student's journey. The academic burden is the next. Everyone wants to do well for themselves, achieve specific goals, and fulfil their dreams. Unfortunately, for some students like Alejandro, their dreams come at the cost of not being able to find housing. Looking at the other side of the coin, students who manage to get into the university are set into a rigorous environment of studying in one of the top universities in the country.

International students, especially, are burdened with proving

themselves in a foreign territory. Already paying a higher financial compensation than the rest of their peers, students might feel they have to fulfil their money's worth and may take on more classes than they can handle. Along with their education, students have to also handle responsibilities like registering themselves at the municipality and other government organizations, cooking and cleaning for themselves, trying to find a part-time job, and making friends. It is easy for a student to feel lonely and helpless in a setting such as this; although they are surrounded by thousands

of students feeling the same way, it is easy to feel isolated. All these responsibilities for an 18- or 19-year-old may seem too overwhelming at first; although one can usually surpass these hurdles, it is not an easy journey, to say the least. In situations like this, students need proper guidance and support from the university because that is their prime source of contact. However, with so many students and such few resources, how can one find this support? Are a few study advisors per faculty and 3 to 4 psychologists enough to keep for a student's well-being?

Quality of Education

Another prominent viewpoint discussed in the protest was the quality of education, which affects students and professors equally. An interviewee mentioned that they believe UvA is exploiting teachers to the point that they don't actually have any time to spend quality moments with students to support their learning. Moreover, the interviewee mentioned that this is a critical discussion that needs to be held with the Ministry of Education and the university's management board.

Student faculties ranging from Social and Behavioural Sciences to Economics and Business are where most students are admitted, and each year this number continues to

grow. A lecture hall of over 700 students and a tutorial class of more than 35 students per week is often too much for a singular professor to handle. Organizing a course for large student bodies can also lead to many technical difficulties. More often than not, professors cannot connect with students on an individual level, resulting in a lack of individuality among students. If professors cannot distinguish between each student, how do we expect the student to go up to the professor with challenges they may face in their course of study?

With a growing student body, professors face an unbelievable workload and pressure. Several junior lecturers were

unhappy with their position at the university a few months ago. With an increased workload and a lack of job security, many lecturers in the faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences decided to protest by not grading papers or exams done by the students. While the protest resulted in favour of these lecturers, it isn't pleasant for them to go through this process just because the university's management did not hear them.

These effects are potent, and they impact everyone that is working within the organization. Immediate solutions are necessary to restore stability and prevent further crises from occurring.



Exploring the solutions

From columnists in *De Volkskrant* and *Het Parool* to student magazines such as *Folia* to professors of UvA itself, the public debate about what actions should be taken are prevalent. Yet, the university has not decided on a concrete plan to curb the growth. In an interview with a *Rostra*, one protester said, “The UvA is saying that they do everything they can, but we don’t believe they are doing everything they can.” Such a statement presupposes that measures are available, yet the university does not want to jump the gun. Understanding the possible actions which could halt the growth and analysing their advantages, drawbacks, and availability is just as essential as untangling the causes and effects. Therefore, we will investigate what the university has said, what the university has done, and what the university can do.



Source: Inés Serhane 2022

Do UvA’s words and actions go together?

Firstly, it should be recognized that the university has been aware of the issue dating as far back as 2018. In a speech at the *Dies Natalis*, the 386th anniversary of the university, the former Rector Magnificus, Karen Maex, raised the alarms about internationalization and a large influx of international students. She asked for help from the Ministry of Education regarding introducing a stricter admission policy and expressed her opinion that such measures as interviews and extensive communication regarding the housing market crisis might help. Despite this, her words have not materialized. No Bachelor course except PPLE has introduced admission interviews as part of the application process, and UvA has continued to internationalize.

The government did not introduce legislation to help the university tighten its policy. The Language and Accessibility Act was dropped and can only come into effect in 2025-2026. It was supposed to enable universities to regulate the language policy, set a maximum quota on a track-level basis and increase the tuition fees, which in the end, would stop the immense growth. However, now, as Geert ten Dam notes, the university has to use the narrow legal room that they have to experiment with possible solutions. So what have they done so far?

This year, a *numerus fixus* was introduced for the Political Science Bachelor track, meaning that only a set number of students will be admitted to this program. These

programmes join PPLE, Business Administration and Psychology as the only programmes with a selective admission procedure. However, besides this and the aforementioned warning regarding the housing crisis, no other immediate measures for programmes have been introduced. Intriguingly, the executive board’s initiatives and opinions are inconsistent with other faculties’ plans and actions. For example, the Economics and Business faculty dean, Roel Beetsma, plans to expand and attract new international students. Courses such as Human Geography and Planning are prepared to be offered in English next year. This unaligned vision of the future for the university is particularly detrimental, and immediate solutions are necessary.

Tightening admission policy

The first change the university could consider is tightening the admission policy, which could lead to various possible improvements. Instead of sending rejection statements after accepting students who did not find housing, the UvA could implement thresholds. Putting into practice a *numerus fixus* for studies that experience the most growth could eventually improve the accommodation's scarcity because less housing will be taken. It would also ameliorate education quality because teachers would have less workload and could focus more on students individually. For example, Ingmar Visser, the director of the Psychology department, has noted that due to the *numerus fixus*, the department has achieved relative stability, and teachers have not reported overwhelming work pressure.

In addition to the thresholds, the acceptance process could be more competitive. Incorporating exams and interviews for some of the programs would drastically reduce the amount of acceptance and will retain only the motivated students. The university will select the most persevering and talented students when adding these requirements. A similar successful policy has been implemented in Lithuania. "The University is giving the fixed number of students who can enter into a specific study program each year, e.g. 200 students this year can start studying law", tells Austėja Vitolytė, Third Year Law student of Vilnius university. Furthermore, the university is free only for students that "show an excellent level of educational achieve-

ments." These policies both avoid scarcity of resources and "filter" by accepting and facilitating the admission of only the most motivated students.

However, implementing a tighter admission policy comes at a cost - education becomes less accessible, and it favours those who are already likely to be admitted. As Bor van Zeeland notes, this can increase the already high social inequality, making a policy such as *numerus fixus* not optimal in his view. Therefore, the best solution may be to have a low threshold selective process and a lottery selection procedure, which could ensure that the university accepts motivated students and an equal opportunity for education for others.

Stopping internationalization

Another offered solution within the public debate is to stop internationalization. While the university has no legal right to discriminate based on nationality, some have provided other practical measures that would diminish the international interest. For example, a columnist from the *Volkskrant*, Aleid Truijens, suggested that universities should restructure their focus to making more Dutch tracks available and only make well-reasoned exceptions for international routes. Bor van Zeeland offered an even more radical proposal to temporarily stop the internationalization of UvA to regain stability. However, such solutions may be problematic, as they may impair the quality of education. For example, some professors, such as

Karel van der Toorn, the Faculty Professor of Religion and Society in the Faculty of Humanities, have greatly enjoyed the diversity in their courses and the different perspectives that students bring to the discussions. Therefore, the most optimal solution would be for faculties to look through every programme, assess which language is more desired in the job market, and construct the courses based on that. Professor Visser gave a great example of the Clinical Psychology master programme being only offered in Dutch since there is a high demand for native speakers in the industry. Thus, such a decision gives benefits not only to the Dutch labour market but also to the university itself.

Moreover, another way of diminishing internationalization that has been proposed is to oblige or heavily incentivize learning the Dutch language within your study period. Such requirements are also seen in other European universities, such as SciencesPo in France, where the university obliges to learn French as part of the curriculum. Geert ten Dam has noted that there might be a point where "you have to learn Dutch if you want to work or study here"; however, the university is "not there yet." Nonetheless, strategically for the university and the Dutch nation, this might be extremely helpful, as it would attract students that would want to build their future in the Netherlands and make them integrate easier.

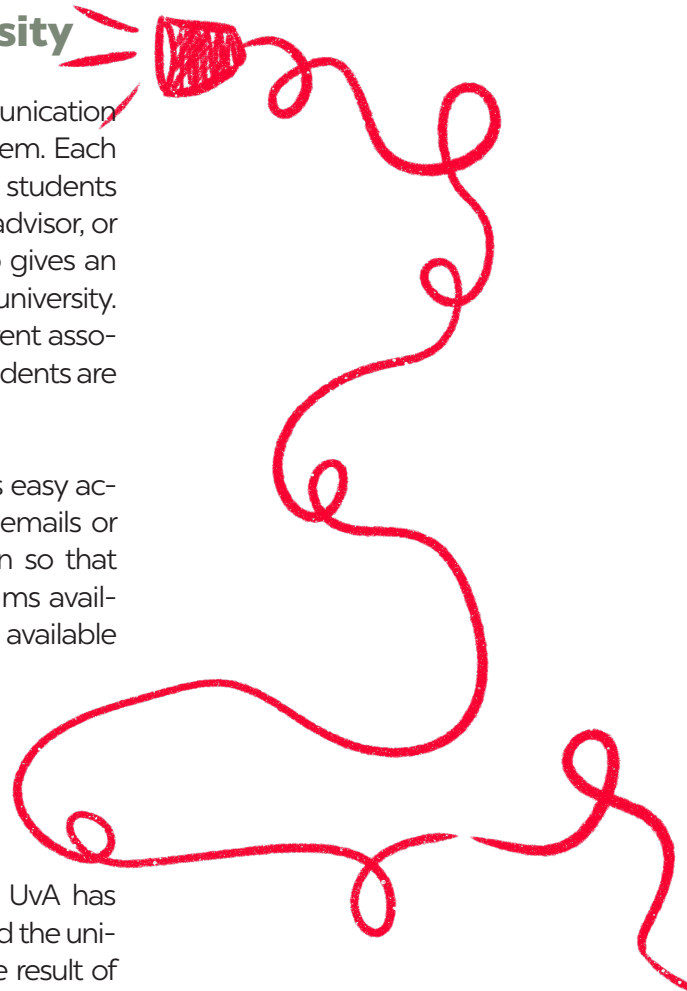
Open Communication with the University

Last but not least, the university should implement open communication with students regarding the different resources available to them. Each course of study has been assigned a student website wherein students can access and communicate with the education desk, study advisor, or even the student counsellor. More than that, the website also gives an insight into student life and other events taking place at the university. Some students would also love to be actively involved in different associations and events that do go on at the university. However, students are often left unaware of where they can find this information.

Thus, the most crucial thing for incoming university students is easy access to said resources, which can be done through monthly emails or flyers. The university should employ effective communication so that students can voice their opinions through the different mediums available to them. This will ensure effective use of the university's available resources and that students get sufficient help.

Conclusion

Everyone can agree that after the pandemic, the growth of UvA has reached an unsustainable point, and the effects are felt all around the university. The student housing crisis is probably the most tangible result of the university's growth, and we can only hope stories like the one of Alejandro don't become the norm. Therefore, understanding how the university arrived at this point and what it can do is crucial to make better policies. At the same time, the issue remains complex, as university board members and staff cannot introduce new solutions quickly, as those result from interactions between the faculty and the central council. Therefore, careful but concrete solutions must be proposed to stabilize the growth within UvA's walls. In the words of the UvA's chairman of the executive board, Geert ten Dam, "you can take [growth] as a compliment, but it kills us."



The Editors



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Economics & Finance

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Image by Elizabeth Palii

Putin's Desperation in Economic Terms

On February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin started his invasion of Ukraine; about seven months later, he announced “partial mobilisation” across Russia. The last time the term “mobilisation” was used in Russia was during World War II under Stalin. The measure sends two main signals: Putin’s plan has gone off course, and Putin is desperate. In this article, we will examine the current state of affairs from an economic per-

Mobilisation

According to the President’s Decree of September 21, 2022, consisting of just ten clauses, of which one is undisclosed, the Ministry of Defence can draft virtually any man over the age of 18 as part of the “partial mobilisation”. The word “partial” is not clearly defined, although state media has begun to explain this by mentioning certain “conditions” that need to be met in order for a person to be drafted, such as previous military experience. However, as it turned out, these “conditions” are neither legally defined nor apply in reality. Regional authorities went as far as issuing draft notifications on

the street, at metro stations, and simply dropping them in mailboxes (all of which are illegal practices). Furthermore, many persons who are medically unfit for any service and have functional disabilities have been drafted and sent to the frontline.

The undisclosed clause 7 of the decree mentioned above allegedly contains information about the number of personnel to be drafted. It has since been reported that the Ministry’s target was 300,000 recruits, which sounds inconsistent with the 5937 reported deaths (according to the Ministry).

Clearly, Putin never planned on announcing any mobilisation and aimed to maintain the so-called “social agreement” that implied the passiveness and non-involvement of the general public in politics in exchange for an overall satisfactory standard of living and business opportunities. Passive consumption of propaganda on television, as well as fear of civil action or protesting, were the key elements that Putin relied on. As he becomes desperate, he is willing to completely alter this “social agreement” and have the war come to ordinary people’s homes.



Human Capital

The first reaction to the mobilisation announcement was the rapid outflow of all people who had the opportunity to leave the country but have not left after the war started in February. Over 370,000 people, primarily men, left Russia for neighbouring countries, most of which have relaxed visa policies. This brings us to the most significant consequence - problems with human capital.

As Putin prepares to send 300,000 men to possibly die or become disabled, even more are making their way to the border. Russia is facing a human capital shortage, especially in male-dominated industries. Moreover, as many of those leaving the country are open-minded young professionals, Russia may stagnate in business development in

addition to the impact of the sanctions already imposed.

As we know from economic theory, labour and entrepreneurship are two of the four factors of production. Russia is likely not yet experiencing the full impact of the labour shortage, but it is undoubtedly heading towards economic contraction.

Poor Statistics

Regarding economic contraction, Russia's Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) has already delayed the publication of results for the Second Quarter of 2022. Likewise, Rosstat has been known for manipulating statistics to present a more favourable picture. The economy certainly has its problems and will be facing more as the current situation continues, but what is worse, in the eyes of an economist, is the

absence of accurate data. When foreign trade is involved, it is possible to estimate figures using the other country's statistics (since bilateral trade implies bookkeeping on both ends). However, when it comes to domestic figures, it becomes evident that data is either insufficient or fabricated.

Questionable data has surfaced mostly around the summer. At one point, Rosstat's figures were

so inconsistent that they did not match conventional economic theory. For example, private consumption has dropped by 10%, yet private savings have not increased. What is more, real income has reportedly not been affected at all. Such data may cause a rationally-thinking person to ask, "what does the population do with the money?" Yet, all we can say is, "good question".

Sanctions

As of now, it is abundantly clear that Putin's plan of invasion has gone entirely off course. The war has been going on for over 200 days, and not much is happening at the frontlines. Furthermore, as Ukraine continues to receive support from the European Union, the United States, and other countries, it has managed to de-occupy large parts of its territory. As Putin became increasingly desperate, he decided to stage referendums in 4 regions that were only partially occupied by his forces.

To justify and motivate the just-mobilised soldiers, Putin promised compensation packages many times larger than average wages. Yet, unsurprisingly, authorities are not living up to the promises the president made, with most of those mobilised not receiving anything apart from the risk of being part of an illegal invasion and death.

As Russia is under more sanctions than any other country right now, much foreign trade has come to a stop. One of the primary

sources of income for the state is the sale of oil and gas to other countries, of which the European Union was a significant consumer. Now that the sanctions have begun to take effect, the state is receiving fewer petrodollars for its oil and euro for its gas; it surprisingly manages to achieve a trade surplus. This is because Russia cannot buy imports from other countries, thus retaining a large amount of foreign currency that it cannot use to purchase goods abroad due to sanctions, nor can it use it to fund domestic

activities, as rubles are needed for that. This also explains the unnatural behaviour of the ruble on the foreign exchange market. In March, the euro-ruble exchange rate was headed towards 150, whereas currently, it is sitting in the low 60s.

Inflation is another relevant indicator here. According to Rosstat, inflation decreased to 13.7% in September, compared to 17.8% in March. Although declining, inflation remains high. Moreover, these calculations are based on the goods that can be accounted for. After the imposition of sanctions, many goods started to be imported using sanction-avoid-

ing schemes, misclassified, or never reported. Most of such trade goes through Turkey and Kazakhstan. Still, many imports are simply unavailable on the Russian market, especially when one looks at western technology or clothing brands.

Furthermore, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, Russia increased its trade volumes with Turkey, China, and India by 198%, 64%, and 310%, respectively. Nevertheless, it is improbable that these countries would compensate for all the lost imports and offer high prices for Putin's oil and gas in the meantime. Such an approach is bound

to fail eventually, as Putin will run out of money to pay his soldiers and maintain a satisfactory standard of living in the country.

Realising his failure, Putin is pushing for negotiations on his terms by effectively attempting economic blackmail with the EU. First, it was the gas payment in rubles, then pipeline maintenance, and most recently, an unexplained underwater gas leak. Now that the heating season has started in Europe, Putin is doing previously unheard-of things in hopes of sanctions relief or negotiations that would favour him rather than uphold the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Conclusion

Despite the delayed impact of sanctions, Putin is struggling to maintain control from both a political and an economic perspective. The sanctions are effective but not a sufficient motivator for Putin to stop the war. As mentioned earlier, there is a significant risk of human capital problems, basically, another Sword of Damocles hanging over Putin's head that is easy to overlook but can cause widescale economic trouble across the country.

It is hard to say what will happen, as this set of circumstances is unprecedented. Of course, economic theory suggests a probable decrease in private consumption as well as production and a general decline in the economy. Still, there is no similar precedent in which a military conflict would cause such wide-scale global and local disruption. Nevertheless, one can be confident that there will be room for mostly negative emotions in this world in the foreseeable future.

Timofey Zhalnin

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Friend-shoring:

Novel Contours on a Primitive Paradigm

Ricardian Economics and Risks of Comparative Advantage

You probably came across the famous Ricardian problem in your economics class: Two Countries, Two Products. It breaks down international trade into four simple factors and has ever since developed into a cornerstone argument in favour of international trade. Comparative advantage, specialisation, and division of labour – some of the key ingredients of international trade – have dominated the world economy in a ‘trade for peace’ narrative since the end of the Cold War. Add to that the global economic liberalisation and integration with WTO at its forefront, and we have the answers to why the iPhone 6 sold 224 million units worldwide, becoming the best-selling smartphone of all time; why French wine makes up 32% of the global wine market; and why Nike’s market share in athletic brands reaches 43.7%, a staggering 20% lead ahead of Adidas.

Little has changed in international trade since David Ricardo. Highly organised and effective logistics unleashed

businesses from the confines of geography, allowing them to hop across continents in search of low-cost inputs and higher profit margins. Such reliance on offshored manufacturing as a linchpin for growth created risks for the exploitation of strategic resources such as oil, natural gas, and rare earth metals by emerging economies – notably Russia and China. It all boils down to what Friedrich Hayek described as a natural course of the circumstance of time and place and the reason why trade exists. Some entities are simply better positioned based on their unique access to resources and knowledge while bearing fewer expenses. In some sense, international trade has been a successful tool for exploiting this economic phenomenon. However, the past few years have seen the emergence of severe disruptions to international trade and significant harm to the underlying supply chains. The US-China trade war, the Covid-19 economic fallout, and Russia’s

ongoing invasion of Ukraine nudge policymakers to rethink the supply chains of strategic resources to limit dependencies on a single state or region.

This is where friend-shoring steps in. On April 13th 2022, the US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, in a speech to The Atlantic Council, stressing “the increasing difficulty of separating economic issues from national security interests” proposed friend-shoring. Simply stated, friend-shoring (or ally-shoring) focuses on supply chain diversification to countries with the same core values and national interests. Indeed, it is becoming harder to pursue economic resilience while facing increased geopolitical friction between significant trading partners. If it sounds like the re-emergence of Cold War mentality, you might be right.

The emergence of friend-shoring is understandable. Trade of strategic resources based on *comparative advantage alone* consistently fails to be sustain-

able in the long term. It neglects **two equally important risks to international trade:** export-oriented production clustering in the same regions and economic dependencies restricting the de facto application of foreign policy.

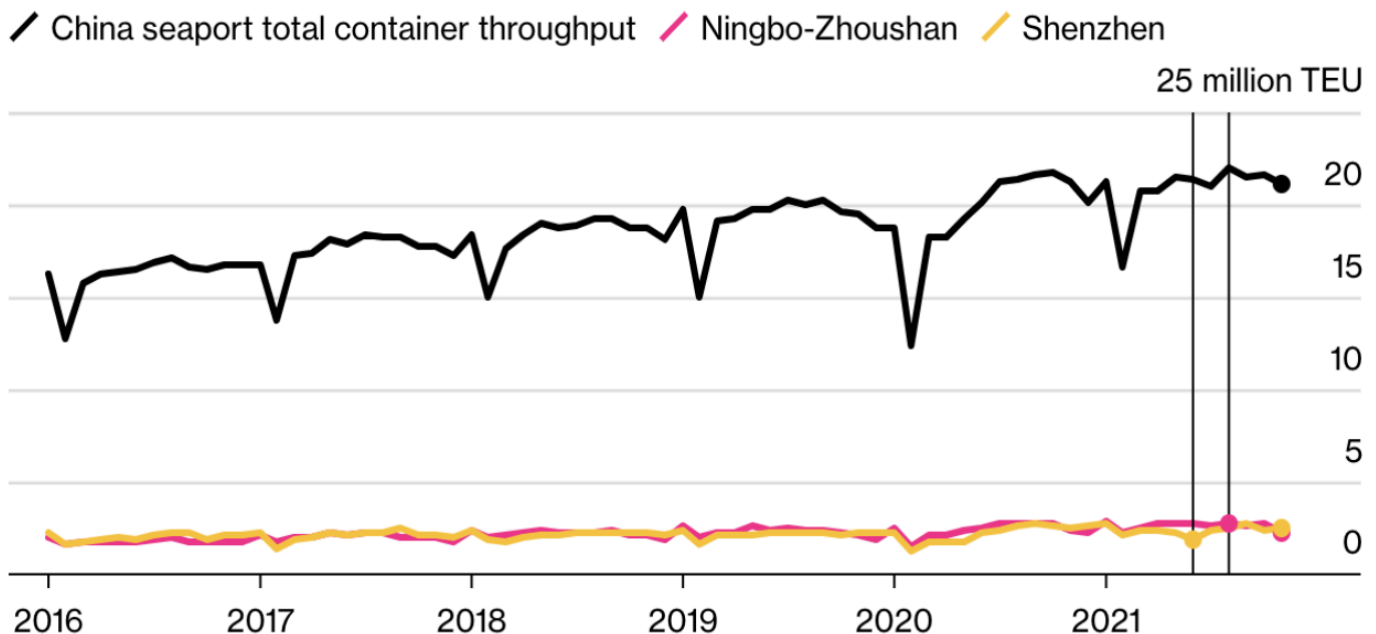
The first risk is economic. Dependencies of individual companies' value chains clustered in the same regions of sourcing, naturally, have a higher risk of leading to significant macroeconomic losses than diversified ones. The far-reaching supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic saw the semiconductor demand

skyrocket across 169 industries, with consumer electronics and car manufacturing suffering the most. At the core of the problem is the limited geographic spread of the semiconductor value chain, which stems from comparative advantage. On the supply side, there is an ever-dwindling number of semiconductor manufacturers that possess the necessary IP, talent, ecosystem, or capital to compete in the market. On the demand side, there has been an exponential increase bolstered by the promises of progress in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and 5G technology. Looking at the

semiconductor industry at face value, three companies – Intel (US), TSMC (Taiwan), and SMIC (China) – together have a 70% foothold in the testing, assembly, and packaging, leaving the rest of the market dependent on Samsung (South Korea) and TSMC for manufacturing. The shortage is exacerbated by the fact that “leading edge” chips – 5 nanometers in size – can be produced by only two companies: Samsung and TSMC. This seamless clustering of manufacturing of a strategic industry, necessary for technological advancement, in one region (East Asia), brings out imminent risks of bottlenecks

Uncontained Growth

Despite port shutdowns in 2021, China exported more containers than ever.



Source: China's Ministry of Transport, Bloomberg (Enda Curran)

and supply chain vulnerabilities which can be evident by China's Zero-Covid approach. **The second one is political.** Close economic ties based on the trade of strategic resources can be reflected in the re-

striction of favourable foreign policy implementation for the importing country. The European need for Russian natural gas is a prominent example here. Policymakers do not want to be restricted in foreign pol-

icy by economic interests so managing the fallouts caused by the Russian invasion was a moral dilemma. The approach taken by EU countries came at the cost of cutting the supply of a strategic resource and at a

time when alternative suppliers were not readily available. This short-sighted economic planning of supply chains carrying strategic resources leads to a point where national security and economic ties inevitably clash; resulting in fragmented industries and economic shocks for people to deal with.

Combined, both risks naturally throw governments towards encouraging reshoring, which is bringing offshored manufacturing back to the home country along with its jobs and supplementary value chains. However, in more liberalised economies, governments have limited resources mandating what private companies actually do. One and possibly the only way is to create legally binding incentives for reshoring, such as tax cuts, subsidies, and loan-guarantee programs. Even then, if a private company does reshore, much of the burden for the costs of incentives fall in the hands of the government – as they find themselves looking into borrowing programs – and end consumers experience a drop in their relative purchasing power.

A combination of reshoring and tariffs – something the Trump administration aimed to do – does not solve the problem of the fragile state of supply chains either. A 10% increase of tariffs on roughly \$350 billion worth of Chinese goods did not achieve initial expectations. Tariffs merely encouraged the diversion of Chinese exports to the EU market, which is large enough to absorb a significant fraction of exports that China would have sent to the United

States. Trump's legacy in international trade, however, has set a stage for American foreign policy in relation to China for years to come with the Biden administration already implementing economic decoupling from China with the Chips and Science Act, Inflation Reduction Act, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, and semiconductor exports control.

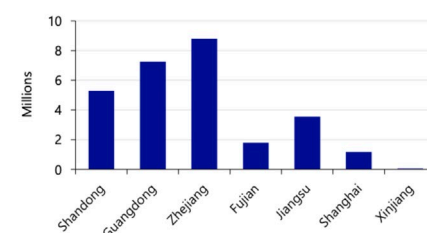
(Almost) Back to Square One: Reversing the China Effect

A friend-shoring concept has the potential to outlast and solve the two crucial risks when it comes to trade in strategic resources. The political risk is solved for obvious reasons; the chances of the United States and Canada becoming geopolitical rivals is relatively low, if not obsolete. The economic problem is a more complex one because the transition to a values-based trade might prove to be messy enough to create shocks of its own.

When China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, the United States experienced a so-called “China Effect” on their domestic manufacturing. The US manufacturing jobs declined from 15.7 million to 12.6 million. You could argue that globalisation favoured US consumers, but it also harmed the domestic industrial middle class. A similar effect might spin out if friend-shoring does take off. In this case, China is threatened to lose out. Chinese labour is enormous, standing at 784 million. However, according to RaboResearch only 28m jobs, accounting for only 3.6% of total employment, are responsible for 80% of Chinese

exports. These jobs have a disproportionately large impact on the overall economy and output as these jobs are concentrated in seven key provinces: Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong, Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Xinjiang. The population of these seven provinces also stand to lose a lot since the GDP per person in each region is disproportionate.

Does it mean that 28 million



jobs can be created in the friend-shoring belt of countries? Maybe, but it is not possible to single out which country will benefit the most. Each country in the potential friend-shoring belt relies on its natural absorption capacity and varies on attraction talent. Say, India has the ability to absorb 500 thousand out of 28 million. Once India reaches that mark, it will no longer be able to create more Western export-oriented jobs, and the handle will be passed to South Korea and so on. Speaking of reshoring (friend-shoring) manufacturing labour, the reliance of Apple on China is commonly used as a benchmark. China is responsible for 95% of iPhone manufacturing and boasts \$55 billion in sales. If Apple moves its complex supply chains, it will be a monumental signal to other, similarly reliant on China, US and EU-based companies that decoupling from China is possible.

State of Friend-shoring Today – Interview with David A. Collard

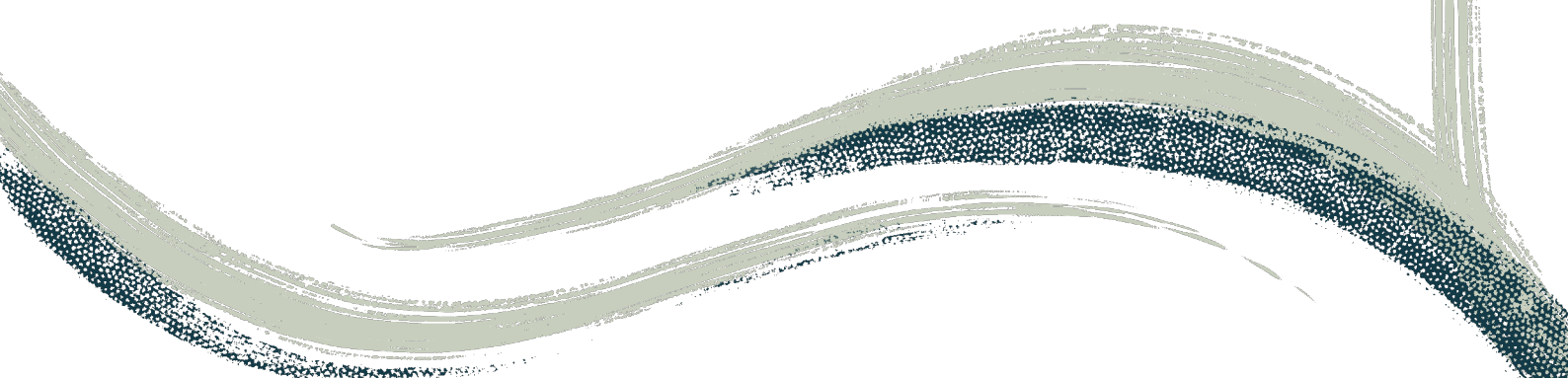
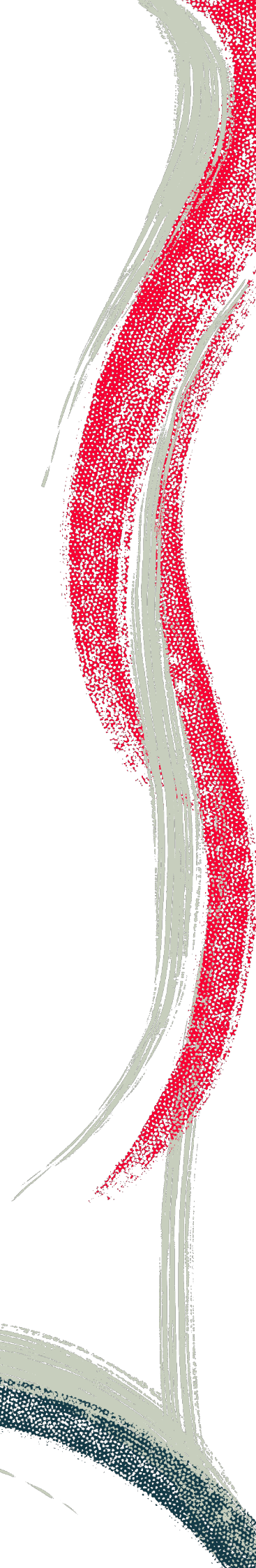
Looking more in-depth at the state of friend-shoring concept today, I had an interview with David A. Collard, a native Australian and a CEO of Manhattan-based investment management firm Scale Facilitation. One of the projects of Scale Facilitation is Friendshoring®, which aims to provide consultation services to a broad range of Australian companies willing to establish supply chain relations with the US companies. Over the course of our interview, David A. Collard gave me a brief insight into his personal experience consulting and establishing an Australian-based large-scale lithium-ion battery manufacturer, Recharge Industries™. The intellectual property portfolio of Recharge Industries™ is valued at over \$500 million.

“During the pandemic, when others could not, I was able to source much-needed PPE for the state of New York and later other regions in the US and the world.” - says David A. Collard. This is how Friendshoring® was born.

Later on, his venture developed into something more prominent when he understood the risks and the need to rethink supply chain organisation. It does not stop there, Australian businesses and government understand that the tides are changing for the better. According to Collard, the Australian government declared Recharge Industries™ a ‘Priority Project’ and has successfully negotiated an industrial relations agreement with the Australian Workers Union. “My team facilitated numerous talent visas in both Australia and the U.S. to support the project and successfully secured intel-

lectual property and technical know-how from the U.S. to enable a sister manufacturing facility to be established in Australia.” - explains Collard.

The trend to friend-shore (ally-shore) emerges naturally and stems from improving stakeholder value in a business. According to David A. Collard, “In recent years it has become obvious that not all nations, even if they can provide excellent workers and output, can be relied upon when the going gets tough, and if they won’t respect international trade laws, other trade partners need to be found.” Other companies, notably Tesla, are also investing in Australia. In 2017 Tesla completed the construction of the world’s largest lithium-ion battery storage system in South Australia, the country’s most wind-power-dependent state.



(Re) Emergence of Cold War Mentality

While Friend-shoring is seen as a solution to the current risks of global value chains, it is also a departure from economic globalisation and a step towards a Cold War mentality in international trade. It could hurt both rich and poor nations, – albeit disproportionately – whose economies enjoyed the benefits of an open trading system and the effects of positive technological spillover. Regionalisation, a similarly popular trend in the world trade, would also limit the scope of globalisation while imposing artificially prompted trade barriers for North America and Europe into the bustling Asian continent.

Chinese officials are already labelling the friend-shoring trend as “reminiscent of the Cold War mentality.” Meanwhile, the NATO Strategic Concept of 2022 openly declares PRC’s ambition to utilise ‘coercive economic policies’ to create strategic dependencies on China’s vast supply chains. “One scenario is where we have divided blocs that are not trading much with each other, that are on different standards,” says Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, Chief Economist for the International Monetary Fund.

The clash of mutual economic dependency and foreign poli-

cy might only pick up the pace from here. Just like the Cold War divided economic trade into the West-East blocs and pitted two rival systems against each other in the 20th century, friend-shoring threatens to do the same but on a larger scale affecting many people and businesses on its way. It is more of a probability than a possibility, that the world trade system under such colossal pressure for change might shatter in the process. We might as well end up at a time where “a rising tide lifts all boats” – a quote once uttered by John F. Kennedy – proves to be negligible.



Riad Guliyev

From Baku, Azerbaijan. Studies Economics and Business Economics at the University of Amsterdam. His writing passion stems from the exploration of varied topics, including International Trade, Behavioural Economics, Financial Markets, Foreign Policy, and International Relations. Apart from academics and writing for *Rostra Economica*, he enjoys sports, travelling, chess, and an occasional hot chocolate.

The importance of being a Luddite

Dealing with negativity fatigue in the 21st century

Fatigue is a feeling of constant mental tiredness, of which negativity is more often an outcome than a cause. Yet, we have come to speak of the two as a singular phenomenon, characterizing our time. In dealing with this phenomenon, however, we must not look to the future for a solution but to the Luddite ways of the past.

To begin with, it is important to answer the question of what a Luddite truly is. Synonymous with the rejection of technology and unwillingness to accept progress, the term has come to bear a negative connotation. It suggests a form of ignorance for which people should be ridiculed. However, the history of the Luddite movement is one of deep awareness and societal concern. Upon seeing the craftsmanship of their trade being abolished, English weavers began destroying knitting frames throughout the Midlands. It was not out of fear of the machinery that they took such action. Instead, it was out of worry about the quality of the

goods produced and the conditions under which they were forced to labour. Hence, the English weavers channelled their negative emotions into a form of “deconstructive action”.

The writings of the American cultural critic Neil Postman echo Luddite history. They focus on whether a technology should be brought into existence and, if so, how it will be used. Questions simple in nature, yet controversial to the point of having Postman labelled a modern Luddite. His lamentations on the media industry’s future were likely a principal reason for this moniker. Namely, he disapproved of television as a medium, of its short-form content and its bias towards sensational news – his accusations were constant. Postman believed that by engaging with television as a form of media, society had accepted a bargain, a sort of trade-off for which the price was unclear. What was evident to him was that an end was being put to “information scarcity”. On the contrary, we had entered an “in-

formation glut” age, exploring a world beyond our immediate surroundings. A world governed by media logic and underlined by negativity, where discerning between relevant and irrelevant news becomes ever harder.

It is an issue for which the solution can be found in the Luddite writings of Postman – a way of dealing with negativity fatigue. That being said, finding an answer to such a complex problem would be impossible without an inside perspective. Dr Jeroen Lemmens is an academic working in youth and media entertainment; Spas Kyosev is an industry native and chief visibility officer of the BESCO association; Dr Penny Thibaut specializes in the domain of political communication and journalism. Each of them possesses an inherently different perspective on the changes in media.

According to Lemmens, being constantly online can deteriorate our emotional and social well-being. He states, “media use becomes compulsive, obsessive,



and problematic for some people. These three combined are often labelled as media addiction.” It is an unfortunate reality that affects our agency of behaviour and thought, resulting in negative personal consequences. Hence, Lemmens believes that in assessing these effects on our personal lives, we must ask, “how does this technology profit from me?”. By reflecting on the hidden costs of media, people would be better able to make an informed decision about its use instead of feeling overwhelmed by the “irrelevance, incoherence, and impotence” of new information technologies.

Before transitioning to the innovation and technology industry, Kyosev was a news anchor for nearly two decades. About his time in media, he says, “with bad news, it is as if we only count bodies, as if death is most important. It is not. I believe that bad news does not make for good television unless it has the power to bring change”. An almost idealistic view in the context of current media, where the predominant focus remains on providing information to the

audience. According to Kyosev, this leads to misalignment, as people already live in an information-rich society. They can neither benefit from the messages that come across nor can they respond to the underlying negativity in a meaningful way. In taking the role of chief visibility officer for BESCO, Kyosev sought to bring forward a different perspective. He believes that “in order to love man, one must become a friend of technology”, while simultaneously remaining critical of it; only in such a way can the negativity fatigue related to it be alleviated.

Dr. Penny Thibaut proposes data journalism as a solution, an innovative approach that uses programming languages to better understand large quantities of data and create new media. She says that it “may bring greater transparency and accessibility in truthfully answering questions”, potentially leading to a return of rational discourse and hard facts. However, such a process would likely be time-consuming and initially unattainable as we have grown accustomed to sensational news. Thibaut explains

that we are psychologically predisposed to pay attention to negative information; it helps us survey the environment and ensure we are safe. Understanding that we are susceptible to negativity creates a greater need for objective long-form media through which people can manage the “information glut” exists. Data journalism provides just that. It analyses and makes sense of the world of negative emotions.

In the 21st century, we are engrossed in constant information, dealing with messages beyond our immediate surroundings. Luddite history and the writings of Neil Postman emphasize the importance of awareness and critique in navigating this new reality. They ask a person to take “deconstructive action”, whether by acknowledging media addiction, finding ways to enact change or searching for a more complete analysis of information. Thus, it is not a knitting frame we must destroy but our ways of interacting with media and technology to end negativity fatigue.

John Gatev

“If Mother Theresa was to give me data, I would still check it.” – Questioning the givens of life is at the heart of my work. I seek to always find the “why” of things, whether it be in education, media, or technology. Currently majoring in Communication Science and Business Administration you can always find me in the library, and if you do, join me for a talk and a game of backgammon.



Natural Disasters: a Whirlwind of Personal Turmoil

The economic and human fallout and outlook of Hurricane Ian and Pakistan's flooding.



Hurricane Ian's landfall in Florida and Pakistan's widespread flooding ruined homes, hearts, and finances. These are just two recent examples of livelihood- and economy-ravaging natural disasters, among many not dwelling on front-page news. We will explore these as proxy examples of how natural disasters can impact humans and the economy connectedly, potentially harming both mental and economic health. Tragically, climate change continues to exacerbate such events' frequency and ferocity, so diverse input is needed to manage disasters

most effectively going forward. The total cost of Hurricane Ian is estimated in the range of US\$50-100 billion. It is projected that Ian alone will account for a 0.3% reduction in US GDP in the third quarter of 2022. This is predominantly due to the disruptions of regular economic activity through power outages, ruined crops, flight cancellations, etc. More severely, the economic growth of Florida and South Carolina will drop by 3% and 2% respectively in Q3. In Pakistan, the floods affected roughly 33 million people, with over 1730 people dying, as wa-

ter had nowhere to drain and public infrastructure proved inadequate. Pakistan already faces a staggering US\$130 billion external debt, so damages up to US\$40 billion and a 2.2% hit on GDP in the 2022 financial year are not encouraging in the face of poor fiscal conditions. The floods also set off a 'catastrophic health crisis,' as water-borne and skin diseases began to run rampant. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the UN, said he had 'never seen climate carnage on this scale.' In the modern world of negative emotions, enduring disaster is

an unwelcome addition. Keep in mind that people are the key capital of an economy; therefore, when the people suffer, the economy suffers, and vice versa. Natural disasters concentrate a lot of physical and symbolic destruction in a short time. The symbolic destruction includes sentimental public or natural spaces, a sense of belonging, and one's way of life, so there is deep grief. One Floridian described Ian's devastating personal impact as 'like the death of a loved one.' At the same time, a Pakistani wants to 'feel settled for once in [their] life,' instead spending sleepless nights in a makeshift tent camp until floodwaters subside.

distress. Therapists have expressed concern over the continuum of negative emotions affecting victims, some reporting that grief is predominating their emotional gamut. Dauntingly, the prospect of people developing chronic stress is looming, particularly with the climate-exacerbated rise in the incidence of natural disasters, not to mention that Covid-related stressors still loom large in the rear-view mirror. There are concerns about widespread PTSD, depression, anxiety, and insomnia in Pakistan as floods and natural disasters have grown more common over the last two decades.

confidence and the markets are hit. The market is also somewhat indicative of the general economy; depending on the period and country, the current and preceding three years of equity returns can explain roughly 22-38% of economic growth trends. If a significant portion of the population is overwhelmed by negative emotion, this reduced economic confidence could have a lagged, dampening effect on economic growth. In October 2022, US consumers assessed business conditions and the labour market less favourably than prior. This regards general economic trouble, like the pressures of inflation and supply shortages, but Hurricane Ian contributed to this assessment. Ian threatened Florida's Citrus Belt, potentially pressuring up food prices, whilst some oil companies shut down operations, Biden issuing them a warning to 'not use this as an excuse to raise gasoline prices in America,' altogether hindering consumer confidence.



Add to that the ongoing mental health fallout of Hurricane Ian and Pakistan's floods, and there must be some economic implications. Research on Covid, classed similarly as an emergency, revealed that perceived feelings of insecurity and instability, in this case resulting from a natural disaster, can lead to behavioural changes due to fear and anxiety. Stress is crucial to influencing or predicting consumer behaviour, with high stress levels generally leading to strategic saving on unnecessary items. Furthermore, the indirect economic cost of mental disorders is much higher than the direct cost. Indirect costs include missed work, decreased

Considering the meaning of such extensive grief at losing material possessions, do we need to rethink our relationship to materialism? Or are these things essential to creating the sense of home and belonging that people now grieve?

At first, a honeymoon phase has people pulling up their bootstraps and managing the situation, telling themselves everything will be fine. It is sadly short-lived, and as tragedy sinks in, up to half of the people who suffer disaster develop a form of mental

So, how do we translate this bleak human experience into economic ramifications? When a national football (or other sport if it is very popular nationally) team is eliminated from a major tournament such as the World Cup, market returns typically dip in that country. While this appears peculiar, since we know that consumer confidence influences market returns, we can glean that events of paramount societal importance roughly relate to consumer confidence. Therefore, if devastation and disaster sweep part of a nation, consumer con-



productivity, and income loss. Thus, with rising prevailing disasters, chronic stress and mental disorders may continue to increase, invisibly constricting economic growth. Of course, our primary concern is for people's welfare, but when human and financial outcomes are inextricably linked, ingrained negative emotions could set us up for economic woes.

The following summary (over) simplifies and generalises the above-explained chain of events.

Firstly, a natural disaster or emergency strikes lead to direct material fallout, such as supply chain disruption or property destruction. A societal emotional response, particularly the inducement of mental distress, follows, leading to indirect economic costs. These indirect costs and the effect of negative emotion on the markets and the economy subsequently open the possibility of generalised financial and human hardship.

So, as we turn towards solution-oriented thinking, policies that ultimately benefit people and the economy are crucial. In behavioural economics, the con-

sequentialist economic account of decision-making teaches us that expected emotions (as well as immediate emotions) play a role in people's choices on a course of action. So, we must manage public sentiments in the advent of disaster and people's changing expected emotions to motivate their return to normalcy and battles with ongoing hardship. Under altruistic motivations, we need to ensure systematic societal emotional and mental support, though the nature of this issue requires us to be wary of dabbling in paternalistic, intrusive, or Orwellian measures. It may be helpful to consider how policymakers can instrumentalise expected emotion, such as encouraging risk-mitigating behaviours. In Florida, where in some unexpectedly hard-hit regions as little as 2% of homes were insured against flood damage, influencing people to take out flood insurance may be beneficial. Maybe even the culture, in general, is vital to disaster management; it is no stretch of the imagination to think that a more service-oriented and hospitable society can support its members better in times of crisis. Some have

even suggested 'climate reparations' where rich nations with high per-capita emissions financially compensate poor, low-emissions countries suffering from climate change's impacts. Pakistan's August rains were estimated to be up to 50% climate change-caused, though Pakistan only emits two tons of CO₂ per person per year, as opposed to 10 in the Netherlands and 18 in the US.

These are brief ideas to incite further discussion. It is great to be creative, taking account of the economic and human facts, and to aim to build back better. We must always remember that economic problems are human problems. We must always stand up to the negative emotions that life's disasters bring us. We can be well-prepared on an economic level, but most importantly, we must be on a personal level.

If you or anyone you know is experiencing mental health difficulties, disaster-related or not, I encourage you to seek out help from someone close, from a professional, or through the great online resources available. The Netherlands' Suicide Helpline is 113.

Indigo Aum Hemingway

Originally from Sydney, Australia. Now pursuing the Economics major of PPLE at the UvA. He enjoys exploring varied issues, including socioeconomic, philosophical, and personal ones, through the tools of analytical and creative writing.





Flimsy Facade of Finance Bros

We all just know that finance bros suck, but why exactly? Is it arrogance, bragging, is it really the profession, or is it all a persona? Being a finance bro (referred to as FB) encapsulates a culture of (young) men in finance with jobs (or aspiring to have) in the sector, primarily in investment banking and hedge funds. Characteristically, it's mostly young white men with an (upper) middle-class family background. Finance bros can be loud in real life, but they make the most noise on the internet, starting in forums and spreading out to mainstream social media like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. But we ask ourselves, why are they making noise, where does it come from and is there a ripple effect in real life?

Idolizing and drawing inspiration from characters and figures can be powerful tools when it comes to changing one's personal life; it allows for the envisioning of who we can become and creates hope and drive to strive for something better. Hollywood has a large impact on this front, because the ordinary viewer can see someone else's life in detail. FBs are no different; the biggest source of inspiration is *The Wolf of Wallstreet* (2013), with Leonardo Di Caprio playing Jordan Belfort, a real person, he works

hard, lives the high life (to the fullest), greediness leading to crime which eventually leads to his fall and imprisonment. Notice that Di Caprio is primarily being praised over Belfort, as Belfort is seen as the criminal, and Di Caprio represents the high life and ends up being the face of the movement. Living the high life is ingrained in most of these guys; the image is their drive. There is a strong visual aspect of looking rich, but casually rich. In real life there is the idolization of Warren Buffett, having the repertoire of old, wise, and entirely self-built, as well as Elon Musk, who is really good at the casual/comedic aspect of being a FB; casually saying he'll end world hunger, but comedically posting stock memes. Buffet and Musk represent the spectrum between pride (of self-accomplishment) and sheer arrogance (rooted in insecurities). All these things add up to the common characteristics of an Alpha male, wealth is an essential component of being a successful alpha male.

You've now got an image of what the end goal looks like, but what lifestyle changes are FBs implementing to achieve it? The dominating motto would be "fake it till you make it." If Di Caprio (as Belfort) is overworking, doing cocaine, sleeping with pros-

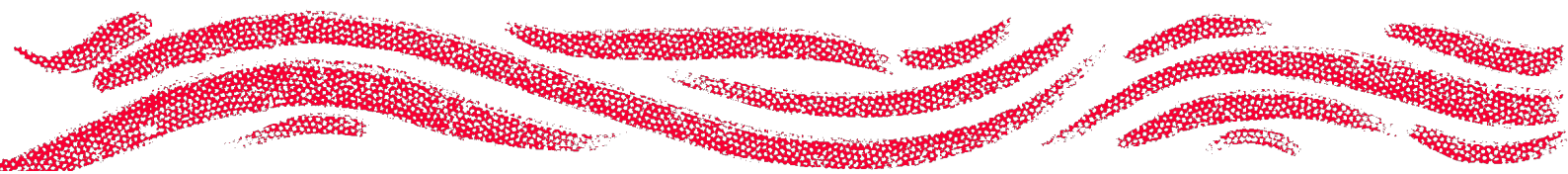
titutes, and being selfish, then one will try doing all these things in hopes of ending up as the final product. Modern finance bros greatly value hustle culture, overworking, getting as many revenue streams as possible, and immediately investing ("wisely" of course). A lot of it is very attitude based and centered around thinking of what you could be when you sacrifice. The physical aspects of change look at fashion, where khakis and Patagonia vests are vital, a fit body, another form of sacrifice, and a clean cut. The way you present yourself in public, what you order at a bar, sitting through an old-fashioned on the rocks because that's what the goal drinks and enjoys. This leads to wanting things your idol wants and has, and this can include the iconic Wallstreet cocaine, strippers and an unrealistically high sex drive (think the "fuck bitches, get money" lifestyle). The latter hones in on the deep misogyny and toxic masculinity that the culture of FB depends on. Looking at the internet aspect, lifestyle changes include actively participating in r/wallstreetbets and following what your fellow bros are doing, which can often result in a woman-hating, toxic environment. Attempting and wanting to "pump and dump", and pretending to have this vast knowledge of the mar-



ket, and downplaying its unpredictability (--arrogance). Most of all, changing your lifestyle means promoting it. Convincing people that “their” way of life is better than anything else, and looking down on those who criticise/view things differently. Constantly being in this cycle often leads to them justifying their actions and beginning to really believe they have “become” their idol (fake it till you make it), stop thinking for themselves (one of the sacrifices necessary to become someone else), which makes the arrogance and pride shallow and rather meaningless. This however, does not stop them from making a mark in the market, and influencing people. Today, trends on the internet strongly translate over to big changes in reality. From cancel-

ling someone on Twitter to entirely removing their platform in real life. Investing culture is no different. The surge of finance dudes skyrocketed with the GameStop debacle. The shift from the internet to life had never been more apparent in the finance world. Starting in a small subreddit, [r/WallStreetBets](#), leading to indebting hedge fund managers and exposing the unequal nature of hedge funds. This was a triumphant win for the culture, as the small group made a real impact (the price changed from \$19.94 to \$347.51 in less than two weeks). Happening in the height, this inspired the Investing Boom, and the number of brokerage accounts being opened increased by 10 million, in the first half of 2021 alone. The nature of GameStop being inter-

net based and getting a lot of traction created a fresh wave of investors and “financial experts” spreading out of Reddit, into the more mainstream of Instagram and TikTok. TNY reported that individual traders now make up 20% of all trades being made, which is more than double compared to the last decade. Mark Dow, an investment manager, expressed his concerns over the new wave as it is full of misinformation and baiting, more clearly seen in crypto (LUNA stablecoin drama). Dow believes there is now a culture of mistrust being monetised, and that is due to the goofy internet nature. The new young investors are gamifying investing, oversimplifying the process, and are unaware of the dangers. Legislation is slowly catching up and trying to pro-



fect ordinary people, but the general consensus is that the democratization of finance and investing is long overdue, as it gives low/middle-class people an opportunity to get a piece of the wealth pie. Hustle culture also finds its place here, with the desperation of having as many revenue streams possible and striving for complete financial independence, but always craving for more. It can be described as capitalism working in overdrive, and working its way to the common person. On the surface, promoting financial knowledge is not bad, but the root of it can be problematic. This includes the culture of overworking, working to do drugs, and ultimately trying to beat the system (everyone else).

The power of the internet is becoming apparent. It becomes a competition of whose voice is the loudest and we find that convincing easily follows suit. The impact of memes has been immense, as it's a simple, light, and easy way to get a message across. The gamification of finance is and was largely carried

on the back of the memification of things, making it easier to digest and understand. Finance bros' god complex makes them sound confident and thus easy to trust, while in actuality it's echoing one another until profit is made, making it an example of the phrase "even a broken clock is right twice a day". FinTwit (finance twitter) is another example platform where discussions can be held, which was initially only with people with financial expertise but is now withered with clueless finance bros who look up to Musk with no critical thinking. This has recently been easier to access, as Musk purchased Twitter for the sake of free speech, which came with boosting misinformation and an increase in hate speech.

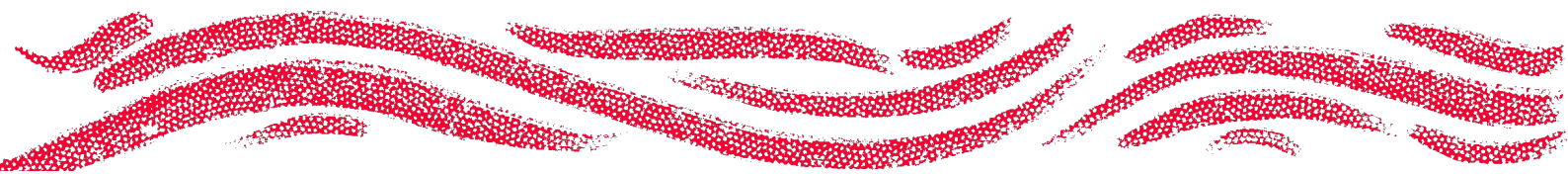
Ultimately, "the finance bro" is just another subcategory of young men who think they know things, convince other people they know things and pyramid scheme their way into making money. Hollywood contributes to this by displaying this easy-to-get lavish lifestyle, through *Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), *Succession* (2018), and *American Psycho* (2000), showing the same archetype

of a man that is able to achieve these things and ultimately inspiring young men looking to be (financially) independent, adopting the lifestyle/attitude choices, that they can and have access to, and being justified and hyped up in their own circle. These movies show how the high life isn't forever, that these deeply flawed characters aren't good people and how it never ends well for them. Interestingly, they don't seem to catch on to the exaggeration and look past the terrible nature of most of these characters and their not so happy endings. The arrogance grows and spills through into real life, which ultimately makes them unpleasant to be around. The internet has been able to create communities and safe spaces but this also results in clueless misinformed individuals confidently roping people into spending and investing life savings with serious consequences. The finance bro movement/population is growing by the day, especially in difficult financial times, first COVID, now the recession, and the spreading of financial (mis)information grows as well, having good and bad consequences. Legislation and regulations are slowly being adapted to keep up with the changes in financial behaviour. Democratizing finance and wealth is a super solid initiative but achieving it is proven to not be as simple.



Mira Chandrikasingh

Third-year Economics and Business Economics student and enjoy looking at interesting trends on the internet and how they translate into real life.



Environmental, Social **and** Governance

The Politics of Resentment

Will it bring down the liberal order?

“The Chinese people will never allow foreign forces to bully, oppress or enslave us, whoever nurses delusions of doing that will crack their heads on the Great Wall of steel built from the flesh and blood of 1.4 billion Chinese people”, as spoken by Xi Jinping last year. On January 6th of the same year, just before his supporters stormed the Capitol building, Donald Trump urged his supporters to “fight like hell” against the results of a democratic election. While seemingly unrelated, this Chinese anti-US stance and Trumpian anti-democratic sentiment show both sides of the two-headed tiger – international anti-Westernism and domestic populism – that has the international liberal order as its prey. These two movements do not only have a shared end goal, subverting the liberal democratic world order, but they also share a common driver: resentment. This partly resembles the Nietzschean notion of ressentiment as self-inferiority, but primarily it is driven by the modern-day notion of resentment as being served a profound injustice. Both heads of the tiger feel that the liberal world order has been treating them unjustly. If the liberal world order, which has been the cornerstone of the

most peaceful and prosperous chapter in the history of mankind, is something worth preserving, these powerful feelings of resentment should not be dismissed as the muttering of the vanquished. Instead, liberals should better understand the root of these emotions and, subsequently, should aim to alleviate this resentment as much as possible.

Outside of the West, no country embodies anti-liberal resentment as well as China. The roots of this resentment can be traced back to the history books. As many Western individuals attach little value to history, they fail to understand the significance of the collective memory of the past for many non-Western countries. In the case of China, the so-called “Century of Humiliation (百年国耻)”, which took place between 1839 and 1949, plays a quintessential role in its resentful political posturing.

This century – characterised by the Opium Wars, coercive trade agreements imposed by Western nations, and the loss of territory to Europe and Japan – is perceived as the founding period of contemporary China. The

narrative goes that the modern Chinese nation is forged out of a crucible of suffering and shame at the hands of foreign colonial powers. The incredible resentment that the Century of Humiliation has spurred can not be overstated. While some Chinese thinkers initially claimed that these humiliations were the natural effect of China’s failure to develop itself, the narrative quickly shifted to a consensus that the blame lay not with China, but with the West. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) capitalised on this narrative and was able to portray itself as the sole force that could stand up against foreign humiliation. Hence, the shared anti-Western resentment became a key legitimiser for their rule a hundred years ago.

The present day is no different. The CCP is still here; the resentment is still here. The Century of Humiliation narrative is central in many recent government and military documents proclaiming that the West – whose nations are born out of “slave states that conquest and pillage to expand their territories, plunder wealth, and extend their sphere of influence” – is continuing its determination to subjugate the Chinese

Source: Associated Press



nation. Thus, many international organisations are perceived as neo-colonial constructs. The West is, once again, imposing its will on the rest of the world.

In our turbulent world, it is, however, key to foster international cooperation through such institutions. The West should therefore make clear that international organisations are forums for dialogue, not will-imposition. This would require reforming international organisations – such as the IMF, World Bank, and the United Nations – so that all nations are represented equally, opposing the current Western dominance. Moreover – unlike Josep Borrell, who recently called Europe an idyllic “garden” and the rest of the world a “jungle” – the West should start really treating the global community, including China, as equals. While the resentment caused by the past

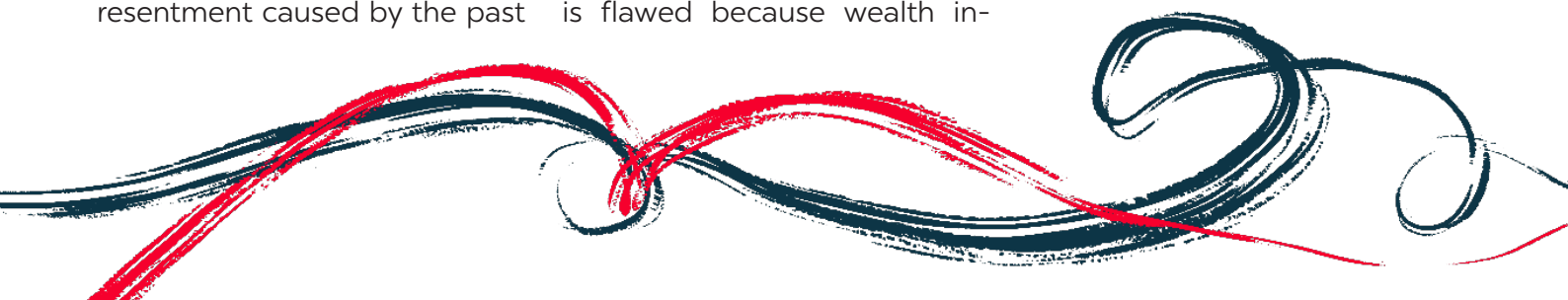
cannot be taken away, the resentful fire should not be fueled any further in the present.

In the West itself, populist movements are the cradle of resentment. Their resentment can be traced back by looking at the fundamental basis of the post-World War II liberal order, which centred around the individual. The liberal promise goes that – by equality before the law and equal opportunity for all – everyone should be able to develop themselves to the best of their abilities. Prima facie, such a liberal meritocratic system seems virtuous, but, in reality, this ruthless individualist competition has left many people disenfranchised and indeed resentful.

For one, this system of meritocracy – a social configuration in which power and welfare are distributed based on merit – is flawed because wealth in-

equality, connections, and discrimination make the ideal of an equal starting ground nothing less than a façade. However, as Harvard professor Michael Sandel argues in *The Tyranny of Merit*, even a perfectly egalitarian meritocracy suffers from a deep moral flaw: it makes people believe that their position in society is entirely their own doing. The notion that our society rewards hard work and talent leads the winners to consider their success a measure of their virtue and hard work. Thereby, it simultaneously makes them look down upon those less fortunate than themselves.

According to Sandel, the resentment this generates is the main driver behind the populist uprising of the past decade. In a society that has eroded their dignity of work, white working-class people – who have seen their



economic and cultural status rapidly diminishing – are bound to resent the system. And, as shown by the rise of the MAGA movement during the past quinquennium, resentful they have become.

Their extreme resentment leads to extreme anger. And most worrisome, the Republican party is fuelling the fascist-reeking fire. After weeks of Republican midterm ads vilifying Nancy Pelosi as the establishment empress of evil, a MAGA extremist attempted to end her political career the same way Kennedy's did. Next, more and more of the resentful MAGA crowd are moving into positions of power. Republican nominees for this year's midterms are more illiberal – demands for banning Critical Race Theory and gender transitions are widespread – and antidemocratic – the 2020

election results are widely disputed – than ever.

While in the short term, it is pivotal to prevent these Republicans from pushing through illiberal bans and anti-democratic voting reforms. In the long term, the only sustainable solution is eliminating, or at least severely limiting, the resentment amongst the working classes. Liberals should then not be like Hillary Clinton, who called Trump voters a “basket of deplorables”, but rather genuinely acknowledge these people's warranted resentments. Of course, tackling the populist wave is a multi-faceted challenge, but limiting resentment among the losers of the meritocratic system is arguably one of the most critical factors. It is, therefore, essential that the elites stop looking down on the lower classes and instead start valuing the

dignity of their work and contribution to society.

As has been shown, the liberal world order is under attack from forces outside as well as from within. As military strategists from Sun Tzu to Von Clausewitz can attest, such a pincer movement – a manoeuvre in which a formation is attacked from two sides simultaneously – can quickly prove fatal. While a democrat-controlled White House and a wobbling China might seem like short-term reliefs for liberals, this does not mean that anti-liberal resentment has gone away. If liberals fail to alleviate the resentment of non-Western countries and domestic populist movements, the anti-liberal fire will quickly light up again. As Ernest Hemingway wrote about the process of bankruptcy, the liberal order might diminish “gradually, then suddenly”.

Abe de Ruijter

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Towards a New Form of Accountability: ESG Reporting Regulations

Why are we witnessing a slow transition?

Have you ever wondered what companies have to say about themselves regarding the mess they make as a result of their activities? How will the policymakers react to them? Then, this semi-academic piece is for you. ESG stands for “Environment, Society, and Governance”. These rules cover topics like global warming, stakeholders and corporate social responsibility. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a business model that helps a company be socially accountable to itself, its stakeholders and the public. CSR covers responsibility and accountability under four branches: environmental, philanthropic, ethical and economic.

The parallel nature of CSR and ESG in their covered branches, like environment and stakeholder, would already be apparent to acute readers. ESG Regulations aim to standardize the CSR practices of businesses. This is because CSR has a broad scope which allows corporations to take advantage, such as labelling themselves as socially responsible, environmentally friendly and ethical. The voluntary nature of CSR brings up issues like “greenwashing”,

conveying a false impression or misleading information about how a company’s products are environmentally sound.

An example of greenwashing is H&M’s unethical environmental and labour exploitative practices in Middle and Southeast Asia, according to several investigations I wrote about last year. The point of greenwashing and deceit in this example is that even though H&M positions itself as a sustainable and caring brand, the environmental damage caused by its operations is severe. An example is the significant sea level drop in the Caspian Sea. Furthermore, labour precarity, which means a state of persistent insecurity concerning employment or income, is another pressing issue. Millions work for below minimum wage in “sweatshops”, a name given to the workplaces due to the number of people working in miserable conditions. Factory workers are constantly at risk of losing their jobs due to competition between factories, leading employers to fire people for fewer labour costs or transfer people to different places. People suffer under these inhumane circumstances. These findings contradict H&M’s

self-promoted ethical brand image, and the voluntary nature of CSR creates problems of accountability. Therefore, ESG Regulations aim to reduce and completely prohibit such unethical practices. These incidents create mistrust and hostility between corporations and their stakeholders. Even though they might not seem harmful to firms due to higher profit, they can damage their brand image and recognition in the long run, which inevitably reflects on their balance sheet. In the current global landscape, where the flow of information is fast with the Internet and social media, people are becoming more knowledgeable about businesses, making practices potentially harmful to outside actors more critical for corporations to bear. Therefore, it is both advisable and mandatory to follow regulations to ensure better market performance and stakeholder relationships.

To ensure more transparency in the activities of businesses, the European Union decided to follow a bottom-up approach by publishing an action plan on sustainable finance. Sustainable finance refers to taking environmental, social,

and governance (ESG) considerations into account when investing in the financial sector, more long-term investments in sustainable economic activities and projects. Arguably, sustainable finance represents the transition in perspective regarding the mainstream of the supposed scope of investment. In the growth-oriented linear economies, the most common economic structure in the 21st century, short-term benefit and profit maximization take priority over long-term perspective in business planning which is usually expressed by the term: “organizational myopia”. Introducing ESG regulations and initiating sustainable finance, and encouraging lending to more sustainable sectors, therefore, primarily aims for change in this perspective.

However, the road leading to these changes is not without obstacles. According to a meta-study, today’s investors face several challenges in pursuing ESG investments. Making sense of the data is a challenge that investors face. For example, the new regulations also involve changes in the reporting standards, meaning the type of costs that firms need to report

must expand and diversify. In the context of the oil industry, an investor from a pure business background focused on short-term yield might neither be interested nor knowledgeable about the specific metre cube or concentration percentage in the water that is polluted and what type of animals are affected by the activities. The addition of new factors brings in new considerations, and brings in new scales of measurement, such as in the example, from the meter cube of water polluted to the concentration of carbon emitted, the impact on air, and marine life, extend from biology, and chemistry to physics. Communicating these terminologies and ideas to people from different backgrounds and mindsets is difficult.

Company engagement with its stakeholders is another important and challenging factor for investors. The difficulty is about getting a healthy impression of the company since it is impossible to measure by “Goodwill”, which stands for the established reputation of a business regarded as a quantifiable asset and calculated as part of its value when sold. Similar to the long-term profit perspective,

companies need to include different stakeholders in the decision-making, one way or another; otherwise, like in the H&M example mentioned above, a company can face social and legal pressure. Big firms like Google or H&M are likely to get away with more accessibility in the legal branch, like in the example of having “tax havens” or in countries with high corruption. However, according to a study, the negative impact of social pressure on the business is much more significant, which underlines the necessity and importance for business owners to operate in line with the ESG regulations to avoid losses in the long term.

In conclusion, this article underlines several terminologies and potential challenges for investors that can be extended to why ESG regulations in the EU and around the globe proceed slowly. This is because organizations need to build up their capabilities to adapt to new rules, internally and externally, by involving more stakeholders and operating as a more collective decision-maker. Last but not least, investors must also adjust to long-term thinking despite the temptations of quick wins.

Meriç Özsüer

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Burning World Overwhelms

A growing concern over climate anxiety

Billie Eilish, a passionate climate activist and the voice of Gen Z, starts the documentary *Overheated* by saying, “I definitely suffer from climate anxiety, and I know that so many people my age do too.”

Like millions of young people worldwide, Billie Eilish wonders if humanity is doing enough to tackle the climate crisis. She admits that climate change is overwhelming — it’s easy to feel consumed by a sense of powerlessness and fear for the future.

Worrying about climate change is normal; most people do. From typhoons to wildfires, floods to droughts, we experience and hear of the terrifying conse-

quences of climate change more and more frequently. A whole generation has grown up alongside a noticeable ecological degradation. The Amazonian forest fires, bleached corals in Oceania, extreme droughts in West Africa, and deadly storms in South East Asia, to name a few, have become a new normal that wildlife and humans are struggling to adapt to. Consequently, many individuals show signs of stress, fear, and anxiety when thinking about how there may not be a future for the next generation - the phenomenon is referred to as experiencing ‘climate anxiety.’ ‘Climate anxiety’ and ‘eco-anxiety’ are often interchangeable terms, and the latter is officially defined as “a chronic fear of en-

vironmental doom”. Although not diagnosable, the recognition of climate anxiety is increasing among psychologists and mental health experts. The youth especially feel an urgency to act, a feeling strengthened by surrounding adults who aren’t responding adequately. Constant worries about climate change can seriously affect your mental health. These emotions can lead to overwhelming emotional engulfment or the motivation needed to take sustainable action.

Understanding where climate anxiety comes from

As I write this article, government leaders are yet to sit down for the UN’s 27th climate conference (COP27) in Egypt. Before the summit, the UN criticized the global efforts to cut emissions; the UN assessment shows that “the international community is falling far short of the Paris goals, with no credible pathway to 1.5°C in place”. All eyes will be on the decision-makers as they debate pressing climate issues, like fossil fuels, and aiding the poorer and most vulnerable countries. Greta Thunberg has been particularly vocal about her climate stress and being constantly let down by govern-



Image by Holly Xiao

ments. She called the COP26 a failure and has refused to attend COP27 by calling it an opportunity for “greenwashing, lying, and cheating”.

The vastness of the problem demands urgent, “system-wide transformation”, as the UN puts it; its immensity also causes the individual to be overwhelmed by the threats climate change creates. A study shows that over 60 percent of young people are ‘very worried’ or ‘extremely worried’ about climate change. They may feel that everyday climate-positive actions, such as eating less meat or shopping second-hand, have no effect on global transformation. A pessimistic mindset will negatively affect your mental health. If left unchecked, the individual may feel a sense of doom and see climate change as a lost cause.

Recycle. Drive less. Eat less meat. Avoid plastic and fast fashion. These messages are constantly marketed to us, often turning into greenwashing. Blame and guilt tend to be pushed onto individuals for their consumption habits while industries and corporations continue to over-produce. Fossil fuel companies, especially, push the responsibility onto consumers by discussing individual carbon footprints and a net-zero lifestyle. At the same time, ‘sustainability’ has

become a buzzword that companies advertise to increase sales — and it works. When consumer choice is seemingly extensive but actual sustainable options limited, when the fossil fuel industry is embedded in societies, there’s no choice but to continue buying fast fashion, using single-use plastic, and using fossil fuel-generated energy. The system we live in makes it easy to convince people to feel guilty about merely living.

What can we do about climate anxiety?

I once asked an employee of a nonprofit organization that is highly involved in human rights issues in the garment industry ‘how she stays motivated, knowing that her impact on social change or industry transformation may be minimal. She told me that having a long-term view of things and seeing the bigger picture is important. Even though her impact is small on the industry level, her being a part of connecting investors, brands, and trade unions is the spark needed to continue her work in the field. Bringing people under a collective vision is complex, but “it’s also the only way to have any leverage and influence”, she says.

It’s important to remind yourself that you are not alone. Change is possible with a shared mind and shared goals. Jane Fonda — a recognized actress and climate activist — finds hope by endorsing young, progressive party members who want to make a difference. Even change on an individual level can make a difference. Fonda says that individual actions that are visible can have a lasting impact on others, and they increase “your credibility as an advocate for the bigger and bolder change that’s needed.” When Greta Thunberg sailed the Atlantic, it didn’t affect carbon emissions but increased people’s awareness of the situation.

Moderate fear is reasonable, for it creates a sense of urgency and self-awareness of climate change. Keeping perspective is also vital if you feel anxious about the climate. Some environmental and mental health researchers have suggested having “binocular vision”, where one sees both the “worst forms of climate change chaos” and the “imaginative possibilities for a better future.” While the two ideas are contradictory, it helps us find a balance between pessimism and optimism. This way, we don’t ignore the impact of climate change and the possibility of an apocalyptic future, nor do we stamp out climate action and hope for a livable planet.



Holly Xiao

Second-year Business Administration student with a passion for reading and learning new things.



The War in Ukraine and Social Media

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th to “protect Russian-speaking people” and “rescue Ukraine from Nazi governing elite and insane nationalists.” Russian propagandists declared they would be happy to enjoy a cup of coffee in Kyiv within a few days, as taking control of Ukrainian authorities and the whole country would be an easy feat. Pro-Russian activists have also claimed that Ukrainians would greet Russian troops with flowers and cheers. But now propagandists’ speeches sound less confident. It’s been eight months, and hostilities between Russian and Ukrainian forces are still ongoing. Reporters and experts from many countries discuss these events almost every day.

There is no doubt that the entire world is affected by this war. The economy and regular supply chains are impacted. Many Ukrainian people have lost their homes and loved ones. It’s natural to wonder how Ukrainians on Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok would react to the fighting and tragedies.

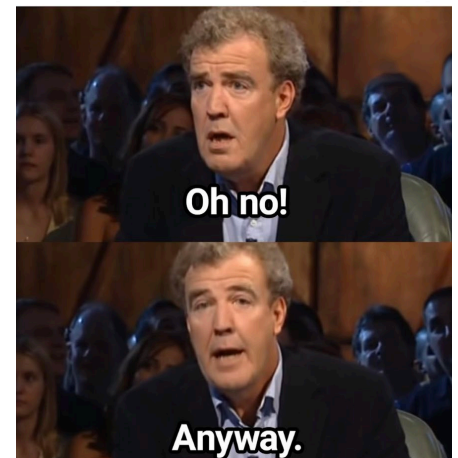
Renunciation of the Russian Language

The first thing that should be mentioned – Ukrainians were more accepting of Russian speakers before the invasion. No one bothered about posting in Russian on social media. Ukrainian people felt the same way about Russian music and movies. However, the war has changed people’s opinions towards that. In one study conducted in 2021 by the Ukrainian foundation “Democratic Initiatives,” 57% of respondents from the Western and Central regions of Ukraine felt that Russian artists should have less freedom on Ukrainian territory or be banned from entering the country altogether. Those were the numbers before February 2022. As a result of the full-scale invasion, that percentage rose to 71%.

And these changes in people’s attitudes are pretty noticeable. When hearing or seeing fellow Ukrainians still using the Russian language in daily life, Ukrainians react fiercely, especially those most affected by military activities. Ukrainian people say it’s equal to a crime to use the language of the aggressor. As one of the central themes of Russian propaganda is that Ukrainian culture is “small” and has no relevance in the modern world, it’s easy to see why some Ukrainians would take this position. The people of Ukraine are rooting more for protecting Ukrainian culture and traditions. However, there are occasions when this fresh response is overly snappy and definitive. Tweets like “I don’t want to see any orc (refer-

Russia trying to terrorize Ukraine

Ukrainians:



Source: Twitter @uamemesforces

ring to Russian) language on my feed” or “If you still tolerate any Russian people - you’re stupid, I should block you” are commonplace these days.

The same goes for YouTube. Many Ukrainian bloggers who previously published their videos in Russian have begun using Ukrainian instead. So, the Ukrainian YouTube community has grown rapidly. Youtubers added sections to their channels with titles like “News From the Bottom” and “Hit-parade of Russian Cracklings” to highlight the illogic of Russian propaganda and the strange events that have taken place in Russia, to both entertain and support their fellow Ukrainians. Journalists at BIHUIS info, who previously fo-

cused on Ukrainian politics and corruption, started releasing videos called “Snoots of War,” in which they feature social media accounts of Russian soldiers who have participated in the killing and torturing of Ukrainians and speculate on their lifestyle and possible motivations.

Laughter Through Tears

One of the well-known Ukrainian poets, Lesia Ukrainka, wrote, “No, through all my tears I still shall laugh; sing songs despite my troubles,” which is another way to characterize the online response to the war.

Ukrainian animation director Maria Ozirna tweeted her thoughts after being questioned by American media in the city of Irpin, which has been severely damaged by bombing. She surprised the journalists by maintaining a cheerful mood despite discussing her terrifying experience and occupation. Maria said American journalists expected her to cry on camera. She added that it was difficult to explain that this is a coping mechanism she used to keep herself from becoming overwhelmed by feelings of self-pity and sorrow. Other Ukrainians, who emigrated overseas, tweeted that their new cowork-

ers thought they were crazy for making jokes about the armed conflict and Russian people.

It's true – laughter can be a stress response that might temporarily improve a person's mood in particular situations. People of the 21st century are familiar with the nature of such a reaction; however, for someone, it still might look strange. On the other hand, Ukrainians aren't shy about sharing their stories and emotions with the rest of the globe. That's why accounts like “Ukrainian Meme Force” exist, where all memes are in English. So that people from other countries may see what all the fuss is about.

Expectations and Reality

The ruling Russian elite likely believed that their propaganda would influence the Ukrainian people in a way that would be beneficial to Russia. However, Ukrainians were able to channel their despair over the constant attacks on civilian cities into determination and rage against their common enemy. Ukrainian people have become more radical; for the majority, there is now no middle ground between right and wrong. They only see the world in black and white.

The way language is perceived also shifted since, at first, Russian propagandists named infringement of the Russian language as one of the reasons to attack Ukraine. What was previously just a means of communication is now taken as a powerful indicator of a nation's strength in the so-called “information war.” The use of language in society started to take on a more active role, and Ukrainians are able to better illustrate this point of view with the help of social media. Ukrainian people repudiate the Russian language to

further distance themselves from the invading power. And this differentiation is openly demonstrated via social platforms. Ukrainians have an emotional reaction to Russian people who occasionally comment on posts in Ukrainian on social media and ask for a translation. When Russians say that Russia and Ukraine are “brother states,” Ukrainians get pretty angry. As a result, this position of denial and safeguarding the nation's culture using whatever's needed may become even more entrenched in the coming years.



Elisabeth Palii

Second-year Economics and Business Economics student who is thrilled by behavioral economics and human nature overall. She is currently one of

UNICEF, United for Children

Small steps for great change


 @unicef_amsterdam



Image by UNICEF

United for children; this is the motto. United for children and their future is how the 18 teams, all based in the Netherlands, engage each year in a mission selected by UNICEF. The case that is currently being worked lies in the Ivory Coast, where kilos of plastic are produced and dumped in landfills, and underpaid workers are only able to recycle 5 percent of the waste.

Furthermore, The Ivory Coast also suffers from an educational problem as 1.6 million children are out of school. There are many challenges both in the environmental and educational fields. For this purpose, all the UNICEF Student Teams gathered to achieve several goals: a better environment, more work and income, and more classrooms.

The UNICEF student team is a nationwide network of 498 volunteers willing to help. The association is grouped into 18 teams and organize more than 150 activities annually to raise awareness and fund-raise about the selected issue. As mentioned previously, this year's mission lies in the Ivory Coast, where urgent help is required. To do so, us, the



students, will get together to organize different types of events and initiatives, such as pubquizzes, open discussions/debates with experts, symposiums, challenges, clothing sales, baking sales many others. Through the events organized, we hope to raise awareness and funds to fulfill our goal. The contributions can go from 6€ for the purchase of a plastic building block to 100,000€ to build a complete school with three classrooms and sanitary facilities.

With the help of the collected funds, issues regarding pollution and illiteracy will be tackled. Additionally, UNICEF is setting up an innovative chain where plastic waste is reused for the construction of schools. Through this chain, we aim to build 528 classrooms, train 150 women and give 25.000 children access to

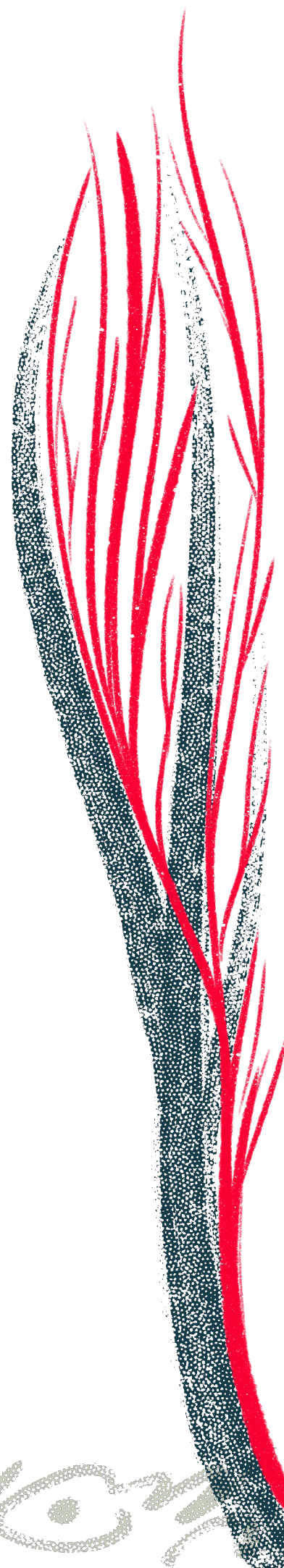
quality education. As a result of joint effort, this mission will reduce plastic waste pollution, improve children's access to quality education and increase income for vulnerable families. All in all, every progress improves the next one.

Our optimism has continued to rise, as 262 classrooms have been built and 1.5 tons of plastic waste recycled. Hence, small steps can achieve large-scale progress, and these achievements are what motivate us and keep our inducement alive. Engaging in such important issues gives us the opportunity to tackle them and enjoy doing something meaningful collectively. Thus, I highly encourage students to partake in many ways possible: become active members, come to events, follow us on social media, share our content, etc. After all, change starts with you.



Inés Serhane

I am a third-year political science student, very curious about the many ways we can creatively report pertinent issues; I hope we succeeded. I am also very passionate about every second of every Wes Anderson movie ;).



Guantanamo: The Story of Inmate 441

Rostra's Interview with Mansoor Adayfi

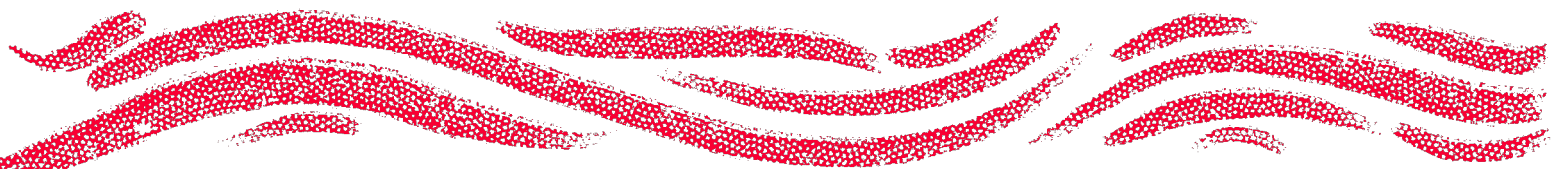
Off the coast of the land of the free lies an enclave of torment, the American Detention centre, Guantánamo Bay. Since 2002 the U.S. government has kidnapped 779 Muslims, including over 17 children, systematically torturing, and imprisoning them behind miles of barbed wire fence and the rolling waves of the Caribbean Sea. Thirty-six remain detained, 24 of whom still have not been charged with a crime after over a decade of incarceration. It costs around \$540 million annually to keep Guantánamo open, making it the most expensive prison in the world. This place is where Mansoor Adayfi would face extrajudicial torture and imprisonment for 14 years.

The first thing you notice about Mansoor Adayfi is his beaming smile that cuts through his curly beard. In an interview, Mansoor defined his spirit by saying, "In order to survive at Guantánamo, you have to have a sense of

humour." He was born in a village in the scenic mountains of Yemen, where he grew up with his 11 brothers and sisters. These mountains cradled his deep conviction in faith, family, and community. After graduating high school, 18-year-old Mansoor was sent to Afghanistan to conduct research for a sheikh at a Yemeni Islamic institute. One afternoon in September, he overheard a report on local radio about hijacked planes crashing into the Twin Towers in New York. A month later, U.S. troops began a bombing campaign in Afghanistan.

The haste of the United States to find the culprits of the 9/11 attacks led to the implementation of a bounty system in Afghanistan. A payout worth thousands of dollars was given to any local who could turn over individuals connected to Al-Qaeda to the U.S. Army. Leaflets dropped by the US-led coalition said, "You can receive millions of dollars.

... This is enough to take care of your family, your village, your tribe for the rest of your life – pay for livestock and doctors and schoolbooks and housing for all your people." Such life-changing amounts of money for Afghans lead to innocent foreigners being kidnapped and falsely exchanged as terrorists to the U.S. for monetary gain. This is the story of 86% of the detainees at Guantánamo, including Mansoor. Local warlords kidnapped and sold him off to the United States as a 40-year-old Egyptian Al-Qaeda member. At the time, he was only 18 and spoke Arabic with a Yemeni accent, something that countless interpreters and interrogators could have easily identified. His freedom was bought for a bundle of \$5,000. Blindfolded, he was taken to a U.S. black site in Afghanistan, where he was subjected to continuous brutal torture and sleep deprivation. In one horrifying incident, he recalled U.S. Ma-



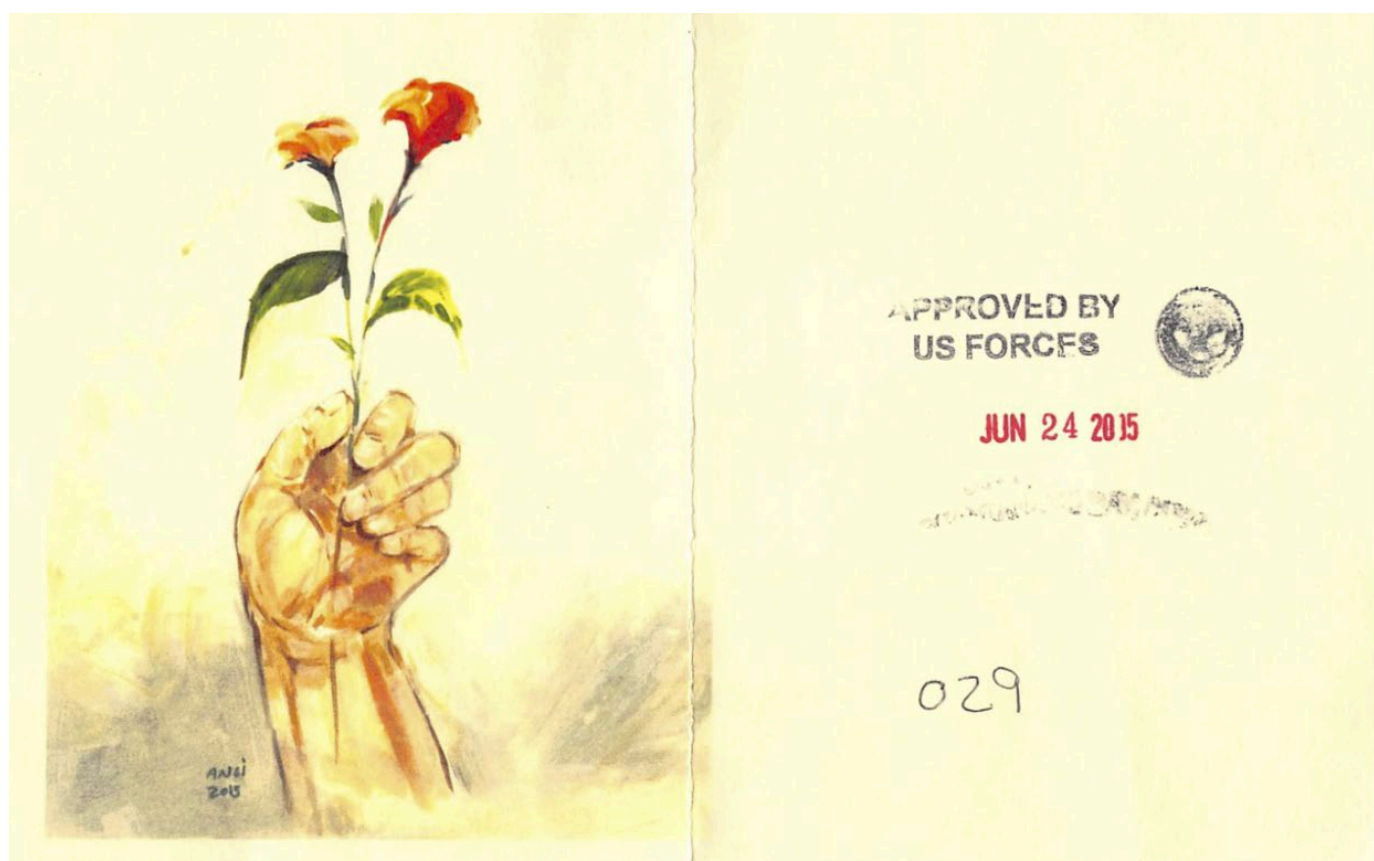
rines restraining him into a barrel, where he was thrown down a hill as bullets rang out around him from unseen rifles. It was here that Mansoor would celebrate his 19th birthday.

He was taken to the airport and loaded on a plane. The U.S. government transferred him to Guantánamo, where the guards stripped him naked, beat him and dressed him in an all-orange garb before dragging him with a bag over his head into a cage. To the U.S. government, Mansoor was no more; only inmate 441 remained. This is where the American-sanctioned interrogations, the waterboarding, the sexual assault, and the force-feeding

The inmates had no idea where they were when they arrived. All they knew was that the sea surrounded them. It played a huge role in spurring the curiosity of prisoners; whenever they could, they would catch fleeting glimpses from holes in the tarps, seeing a mosaic of blues and greens hypnotically escaping from the sand. Seeing freedom. One day a miracle happened, a hurricane had rolled into Cuba, and the tarps had to be taken down until the storm passed. The prisoners were ecstatic and spent the next few days soaking up the unobstructed view of the liberated horizon. Even if their physical bodies were confined, the prisoners used art

flee. The art that was produced is hauntingly beautiful. The scenes depicted are ones of aching loneliness underpinned by the human spirit's will to survive.

Art was also used as a tool of reconciliation. Later in his detention, Mansoor saw a new soldier who had been posted on guard duty standing stiffly. The soldier's mother had begged him not to go to Guantánamo; she pleaded with him, warning him that the detainees were dangerous brutes. However, here he was behind the barbed-wire fence, infected by Mansoor's positivity, laughing, and smiling. In one conversation, the guard told Mansoor of his mother's wor-

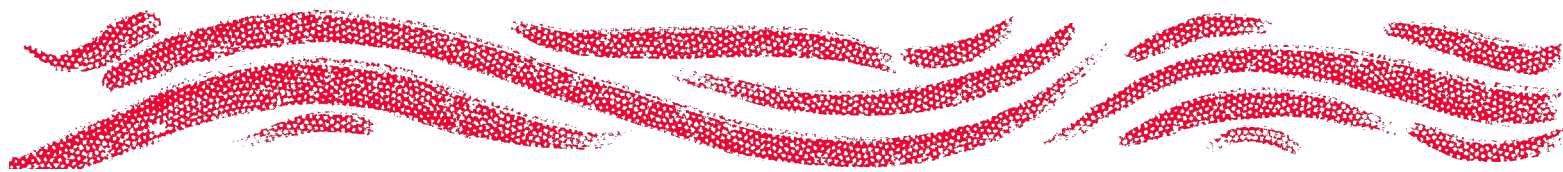


Artwork By Muhammad Ansi

would occur. For years there were no formal charges and no rights. In our interview, Mansoor put it succinctly, "Guantánamo is a place beyond the law. Beyond humanity".

as their medium for liberation. Mansoor recalled, "Each of us found a way to escape to the sea". Inmates would draw paintings, make sculptures, and write poems, letting their imaginations

ries about Guantánamo. Mansoor returned with flowers he had created from paper, placed in a makeshift vase; it was for the soldier's mother. A gift from Guantánamo. The art became



dangerous for the international perception of the U.S. and its treatment of detainees, which led President Trump to ban the release of many pieces. President Biden has yet to overturn this ban despite open letters and human rights campaigns. The detainees were subjected to much humiliation. One of the most demeaning examples is when U.S. guards locked the detainees in their cells whilst burning, spitting on and urinating on the Qur'an. Forms of such fundamental disrespect led to the prisoners banding together, "We made a brotherhood", Mansoor told Rostra. Together the inmates would organize and collectively retaliate when they were harmed. The primary way this was done was through hunger strikes. Mansoor would perform the strikes until his cheeks were sunken in, and he was confined to a bed, hallucinating and sweating. After a few weeks, the guards grabbed Mansoor, strapping him down into a dentist's chair, accusing him of using his hunger as a form of Islamic warfare.

Plastic tubes were jammed up his nose, forcing their way into his stomach, where food would be pumped into his body. This is how far Mansoor would go for his faith and friendship with the other detainees. They were the reason he kept going, and they were a source of strength during some of the most harrowing experiences.

After 14 years, Mansoor was finally released in 2016 at 32 years old. While he was detained, his home of Yemen had become embroiled in a civil war between Houthis and the Saudi and U.S.-backed Yemeni Military. Although returning to Yemen was not an option, he still had family in Oman and Qatar and wanted to be reunited with them. The U.S. government declined. Instead, they put him on a plane and sent him to Serbia even after he refused. Mansoor calls his time in Serbia "Guantánamo 2.0". Currently, he is in Belgrade, where the Yemeni government refuse to grant him a passport, meaning he cannot leave the country,

get married or conduct himself freely. Yet he is still determined and upbeat. Even after his 14-year ordeal, Mansoor remains youthful in attitude and energy. He's an avid runner and writer. In 2021 Mansoor published *Don't Forget Us Here*, a moving memoir of the resilience of the human spirit in the face of the horrors of Guantánamo. On top of this, Mansoor is the project coordinator of the NGO Cage Guantánamo, advocating for the thousands of U.S. torture victims as well as petitioning the American government for the release of the 36 who remain behind Guantánamo's walls.

Mansoor's story is one of 780 Muslims who were subjected to U.S. sanctioned torture against their minds, bodies and souls. Guantánamo, under every definition, is a crime against humanity. No one, guilty or innocent, should ever face such unspeakable horrors. After four administrations, Guantánamo remains open to this day. But so does Mansoor's resolve for justice and humanity.

Yazan Azab

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